

FETHULLAH GÜLEN'S VIEWS ON ISLAM AND DEMOCRACY

The Institute of Economics and Social Sciences  
of  
Bilkent University

by

BERRİN KOYUNCU

In Partial Fulfillment Of The Requirements For The Degree of  
MASTER OF ARTS IN POLITICAL SCIENCE AND PUBLIC  
ADMINISTRATION

in

THE DEPARTMENT OF  
POLITICAL SCIENCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION  
BILKENT UNIVERSITY  
ANKARA

August, 1997

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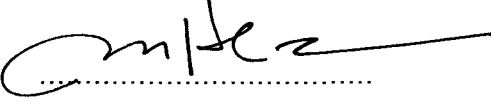
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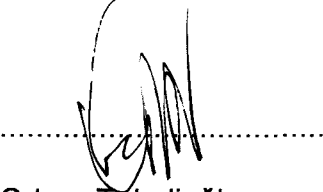
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I certify that I have read this thesis and in my opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Political Science and Public Administration.



Metin Heper

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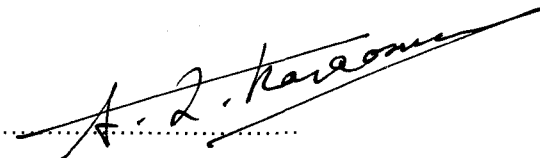
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Ümit Cizre Sakallıoğlu

Approval of the Institute of Economics and Social Sciences



## **ABSTRACT**

### **FETHULLAH GÜLEN'S VIEWS ON ISLAM AND DEMOCRACY**

**Berrin Koyuncu**

**Department of Political Science and Public Administration**

**August 1997**

**This thesis analyzes the compatibility of Islam and democracy in Turkey in the light of Fethullah Gülen's views. In Turkey, the most significant obstacle in front of consolidation of democracy seems to be the irreconcilable attitudes of the radicals- both on the part of the Islamists and on the part of the secularists. It can be claimed that if those radical parts are rasped, consensus politics and social harmony will be inevitable. Fethullah Gülen may play a key role at this point through his re-interpretation of Islam in the light of Islamic and communal traditions specific to Anatolia.**

## ÖZET

### FETHULLAH GÜLEN'İN İSLAM VE DEMOKRASİ ÜZERİNE DÜŞÜNCELERİ

Berrin Koyuncu

Siyaset Bilimi ve Kamu Yönetimi

Ağustos 1997

Bu tez, Türkiye'de İslam ve demokrasinin bağdaşabilirliğini Fethullah Gülen'in görüşleri ışığında açıklamaya çalışmaktadır. Türkiye'de demokrasinin yerleşmesi sürecindeki en önemli engel hem İslamcıların hem de laiklerin arasında bulunan radikallerin uzlaşmaz tutumlarıdır. Eğer her iki tarafta da görülen radikal tutumlar törpülenirse, uzlaşma siyaseti ve sosyal uyum kaçınılmaz hale gelir. Bu noktada İslamı, Anadolu'ya özgü İslami ve toplumsal gelenekler ışığında yeniden yorumlayan Fethullah Gülen önemli rol oynayabilir.

## ACKNOWLEDMENTS

This thesis owes a lot to Metin Heper for his invaluable comments and criticisms

I am grateful to Ümit Cizre Sakallıoğlu and Orhan Tekelioğlu who helped me to develop the thesis alongside their comments. I want to thank Murat for providing me a lot of sources. I am grateful to Hidayet and Alpaslan for typing some part of the text and supporting me whenever I complain about difficulties of writing the thesis. My greatest debt of gratitude is to my parents who encourage me for this work.

To My Family



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# FETHULLAH GÜLEN'S VIEWS ON ISLAM AND DEMOCRACY

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

With the end of Cold War, the disintegration of the USSR, and the declining appeal of left-wing ideas in the past few years, the hopes for the further expansion of representative democracy have increased. Western countries have witnessed not only the collapse of a strategic counterweight to their influence in the world, but also the failure of a rival model of a voluntary and authoritarian modernization which in the recent past has inspired many a third world experiment in state-building.<sup>1</sup> A new wave of universalism has filled the void: if democratization is feasible in Eastern Europe, it may also take root in other regions. Representative democracy which is a form of indirect rule by the majority of the electorate, a system in which political decision-making is done by a small number of people elected by the whole electorate<sup>2</sup> has become a kind of "common good of humanity" or, at least, a mode of government widely considered as normatively superior.

Contemporary events in the Arab-Islamic region have reinforced a contrary but a widespread idea according to which that part of the world has been too slow in adjusting to this trend. They have been somewhat resistant

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<sup>1</sup> Ghassan Salame (ed), Democracy Without Democrats: The Renewal of Muslim Politics in the Muslim World. (London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd., 1994), 1.

<sup>2</sup> David Robertson, A Dictionary of Modern Politics. (London: Europa Publications, 1993), 295.

to a rapid democratization process.<sup>3</sup> The region stretching from "Tehran to Marrakesh" has witnessed the uninterrupted rule of authoritarian leaders. At this point, the special situation of the Arab Islamic Middle Eastern countries must be reconsidered. Why do these countries resist to democratization process ? Some observers think this region as an exception and attribute this exceptionalism to Islam. As Jean Leca reminds us <sup>4</sup>, the presumed Arab "exceptionalism" is generally linked to Islam, but the connection is not unique: it may be, as Gellner notes, that the Arab world is exceptional concerning democracy because of historical factors <sup>5</sup> that are unique but not necessarily instigated by the predominance of Islamic faith.

Observing the resistance of the Middle Eastern countries to democratization, there has been a tendency in the West to presume that Islam is antithetical to democracy. The belief in "progress" and "secularism", twin pillars of Enlightenment, has often led to the unquestioned assumption that Islam and democracy "the political system of modern choice" <sup>6</sup> are incompatible. Bernard Lewis raised this question by asking whether liberal

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<sup>3</sup> Ghassan Salame (ed), Democracy Without Democrats: The Renewal of Muslim Politics in the Muslim World. (London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd., 1994), 1.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, 1.

<sup>5</sup> Ernest Gellner attributed lack of political representation in Arab countries to traditional weakness of the cities. "Classical umma" lives under a divine law whose protector is the "umma" itself. The ruler is neither the source nor the guarantee of law. He is the only executive power. So the state becomes a superstructure with which population does not identify itself (Salame, 1994:62). Ends-oriented state, the burden of military, state-dependent middle class are other such factors.

<sup>6</sup> John Esposito and James Piscatori, " Democratization and Islam", Middle East Journal, 45:3 (1991), 428.

democracy can work in a society inspired by beliefs, and principles shared by Islamic experience and tradition.<sup>7</sup> In this thesis, I will try to address the same difficult question of whether Islam and democracy can be reconciled by studying the views of Fethullah Gülen<sup>8</sup> on Islam and democracy. The dramatic importance of the question under discussion is that, Islam, one of the major world religions, may be going through a turning point in its history, "one that will bring it face-to-face with the challenges of the human condition at the end of the twentieth century".<sup>9</sup>

From the beginning of the 1990s, Fethullah Gülen has been a visible figure in the social and political life of Turkey. I think what makes Fethullah Gülen popular is that he is presumed to come up with ideas that can be considered as an alternative to the views propagated by the Prosperity Party (PP). Representing cultural Islam which gives priority to individual faith over political factors, Fethullah Gülen challenges the political Islam of the PP.<sup>10</sup> Here what is meant by cultural Islam is a social movement which conceives Islam as a culture that is based on traditions, beliefs of a community. Fethullah Hoca reinterprets Islam by using the traditions and beliefs that are

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<sup>7</sup> Bernard Lewis, "Islam and Liberal Democracy", Atlantic Monthly, 271 (Feb 1993), 88.

<sup>8</sup> The leader of a group known as "Fethullahcıs", a branch of Nurcu movement that is based upon Said-i Nursi's Risales.

<sup>9</sup> Abdou Filal-i Ansary, "The Challenge of Secularization", Journal of Democracy, 7:2 (Apr 1996), 76.

<sup>10</sup> Nilüfer Göle, "Authoritarian Secularism and Islamist Politics: The Case of Turkey", in Civil Society in the Middle East, A. Richard Norton (ed), (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), 27.

the characteristics of Turkish nation. It calls for a cultural renewal and thus it distances itself from any political movement or ideology. The difference between cultural Islam and political Islam is that whereas the former aims at having autonomy from the state, the latter seeks for state power. Because cultural Islam does not aim at grasping power, it becomes functional in the construction of civil society.<sup>11</sup> Another important reason that inspired this study is Fethullah Gülen's radical re-interpretation of Islam. This opens up entirely new possibility of the reconciliation of Islam and democracy in Turkey.

In short, this thesis shall compare Fethullah Gülen's views with the PP's views on Islam and democracy and it will focus on whether Gülen's views on Islam and democracy render them more compatible. The plan of the thesis will be as follows: the first chapter is the introductory chapter in which the subject of the thesis and its significance is mentioned. In the second chapter, the issues related to the compatibility of Islam and democracy is presented. In the third chapter, the relationship between Islam and democracy in Turkey is examined. The fourth chapter studies Fethullah Gülen's views on Islam and democracy. In the fifth chapter, the differences between Fethullah Gülen's and the PP's perspectives to the issue of Islam and democracy are discussed. In the light of Fethullah Gülen's views, the sixth, concluding chapter looks at the prospects for reconciliation of Islam and democracy in Turkey.

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<sup>11</sup> Ali Yaşar Sarıbay, Postmodernite, Sivil Toplum, İslam. (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1994), 187.

## CHAPTER II

### ARE ISLAM AND DEMOCRACY COMPATIBLE ?

As Bernard Lewis states, in the discussion of major issues, it is fatally easy to go astray by misuse or misinterpretation of some of the words that one uses.<sup>12</sup> That is why I should first clarify what is meant by the terms "liberal democracy" and "Islam".

Liberal democracy has two aspects. First aspect is associated with representation. Here, the usual system is the election by the whole electorate of a small number of representatives, in most cases organized in political parties forming a legislative assembly. The majority of this assembly makes the law, and many, in parliamentary systems like those of United Kingdom and Canada, select some among themselves to form the executive. It is thus a rather indirect form of a majority rule.

Other aspect refers to a set of traditional values drawn from the basic stock of civil rights and natural rights which may be enshrined in a constitution and protected by the courts.<sup>13</sup> Liberal democracy is associated with limited government (limited by the constitution), free elections, protection of individual rights and political representation.

Islam denotes a religion -- a system of belief, worship, doctrine and ideals --that belongs to the family of monotheistic, scriptural religions that

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<sup>12</sup> Bernard Lewis, "A Historical Overview", Journal of Democracy, 7:2 (Apr 1996), 52.

<sup>13</sup> Robertson, 282.

includes Judaism and Christianity. In other words, Islam refers to the whole human civilization that has developed under the aegis of that religion: something like what is meant by the one-common term "Christendom".<sup>14</sup> In Islam, Sharia came to mean the divinely mandated path, the straight path of Islam, that Muslims were to follow, that is God's will or law. But because the Quran does not provide an exhaustive body of laws, the desire to discover and delineate Islamic law in a comprehensive and consistent fashion led to the development of an Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*). *Fiqh* is an Arabic word whose basic meaning is understanding/interpretation. By extension it denotes science or discipline that has sought to ascertain, interpret, and apply God's will or guidance (Sharia) as found in the Quran to all aspects of life. As a result of al-Shaffii's efforts, classical Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) recognized four primary sources, as well as other subsidiary, sources.<sup>15</sup>

The leading primary source of Islam is the Quran which is the sourcebook of Islamic principles and values. While the Quran contains legal prescriptions, the bulk of it consists of broad, general moral directives on what Muslims ought to do. The Quranic principles and values were concretized and interpreted by the second and complementary source of law, the Sunna of the prophet, the normative behavior of Muhammed.<sup>16</sup> Third classical source of Islam is independent reasoning *ijtihad* (to strive or

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<sup>14</sup> Lewis, " Historical ", 53.

<sup>15</sup> John Esposito, Islam: The Straight Path. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 79.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, 80.



struggle intellectually). When faced with new situations or problems scholars have sought a similar situation in the Quran and the Sunna. The key is the discovery of the effective cause or reason behind a Sharia rule. If a similar reason could be identified in a new situation or case, then the Sharia judgement was extended to resolve the case. Fourth source of Islamic law is the authority for consensus (*ijma*) which is usually derived from the saying of the Prophet, "My community will never agree on an error". Consensus served as a brake on the vast array of individual interpretations, as legal scholars contributed to the creation of a relatively fixed body of laws.<sup>17</sup>

The reason why the classical sources of Islam were mentioned is to differentiate the use of Islam in this context from the neo-Islam of the so-called "fundamentalists" who introduce ideas known neither to the Quran nor to the Sunna and classical doctrines of faith.<sup>18</sup> Muslim fundamentalists think that the community of Islam has been led into error by foreign infidels and Muslim apostates. It is widely claimed that Muslim apostates abandoned the laws and principles of faith, and adopted secular ("heathen") laws and values. All the foreign ideologies such as liberalism or socialism are considered evil because they, supposedly, set Muslim against Muslim. The Muslim world is now suffering the inevitable consequences of forsaking the God-given law and a way of life that were vouchsafed to it. As a remedy, they propose the old Muslim obligation of "*jihad*": to wage holy war at home, against the

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<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, 84.

<sup>18</sup> Lewis, "Historical ", 54.

pseudo-Muslim apostates and then re-Islamize society to resume the greater role of Islam in the world.<sup>19</sup> It is obvious that for Islamic fundamentalists, liberal democracy is an irrelevance. But it is a dilemma that they are willing to demand and exploit the opportunities that a “self-proclaimed” democratic system is bound to offer.<sup>20</sup> Thus, it is significant to emphasize that we are not really concerned about the compatibility of democracy and Islamic fundamentalism. What should be questioned, here, is the compatibility of democracy and Islam itself.<sup>21</sup>

### *2.1 Issues Related to Compatibility of Islam and Democracy*

One may ask now whether Islam as a religion or as a civilization antithetical to liberal democracy. According to Bernard Lewis, from a historical perspective, Islam offers the best-prospects for liberal democracy.<sup>22</sup> The most significant element in the Islamic tradition regarding democracy is the classical Islamic concept of supreme sovereignty which should be elective and contractual.<sup>23</sup> The central institution of sovereignty in the traditional

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<sup>19</sup> Lewis, “Islam”, 91.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, 91.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, 91.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*, 88.

<sup>23</sup> Lewis, “Islam”, 91.

Islamic world, the caliphate, is defined by the Sunni jurists to have contractual and consensual features that distinguish caliphs from despots. The exercise of political power is conceived and presented as a contract, creating bonds of mutual obligation between the ruler and the ruled. Subjects are duty-bound to obey the ruler and carry out his orders, but the ruler has also duties toward subjects, similar to those set forth in most cultures. The contract can be dissolved if the ruler fails to fulfill or ceases to be capable of fulfilling his obligations.

The Islamic principle of consultation, according to which a ruler should not make arbitrary decisions by himself but act only after consulting with suitably qualified advisors, was brought to the agenda as a sign of democracy in Islam.<sup>24</sup> In fact, some scholars argue that Islam is inherently democratic not only because of the principle of consultation, but also because of the practices of *"ijtihad"* (independent reasoning) and *ijma* (consensus). It is argued that just as Islamic law is rescued from the charge of inflexibility by the right of jurists in certain circumstances to employ independent judgement; similarly, Islamic political thought is rescued from the charge of autocracy by the need of rulers to consult widely, and to govern on the basis of consensus. Muhammed Asad, an influential modernist Muslim thinker put the matter forcefully: "The legislative assembly...majlis ash-shura must be truly representative of the entire community, both men and women...the members

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<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, 98.

of the “majlis” must be elected by means of widest possible suffrage, including both women and men ”.<sup>25</sup>

Acceptance of pluralism in Islamic law and practice is also important for the debate on compatibility of Islam and democracy. One of the sayings traditionally ascribed to the Prophet is this remark, “Difference of opinion within my community is a sign of God’s mercy ”. In other words, diversity is to be welcomed, rather than suppressed.<sup>26</sup> From the beginning, the Islamic world has been inclusive. Extending over three continents, it embraced a wide variety of races, creeds and cultures which lived side by side in harmony. Despite sectarian strife and religious persecution, unity and diversity of perspectives was always there.

The acceptance of four different schools of thought by Sunni Muslims exemplifies the pluralist attitude in Islam. Acceptance of diversity and mutual tolerance to differences of opinion show that it is possible to be orthodox while differing.

It is also claimed that there are no essential contradictions between Islam and human rights doctrines. The most primary right of a human-being is the right to live and own private property. These two rights were ensured by the Prophet Muhammed in his address to the people on the occasion of his farewell pilgrimage: “Your blood and your property are sacrosanct until you meet your Lord, ...know that every Muslim is Muslim’s brother, and that the

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<sup>25</sup> Esposito and Piscatori, “Democratization”, 434-5.

<sup>26</sup> Lewis, “ Historical ”, 56.

Muslims are brethen. It is only lawful to take from a brother what he gives willingly".<sup>27</sup>

Another basic human right is the freedom of conscience. The Quran fully guarantees this right in the following verse: "There is no compulsion in the religion " (Sura 2, Verse 256). The Muslims must not only respect others' freedom of conscience, but they are even expected to be generous to those non-Muslims who do not fight against them in the cause of religion. The Quran says, "Allah forbiddeth you not respecting those who warred not against you on account of religion and drove you not out of your homes that you should show them kindness and deal justly with them. Allah loves the just dealers" (Sura 60, Verse 8).<sup>28</sup>

The Prophet himself set a noble example of religious toleration when he signed a treaty with the Christians of Najran. The following are the terms of this treaty as narrated by Ibn Qayyim: "From Muhammed, the Prophet to Abu Harth and the bishops of Najran and their priests and monks and those who live in their churches and their slaves; all of them will be under protection of God and his Prophet ; no bishop will be removed from his bishopric, no monk will be removed from his monastery...there will be no change in the rights enjoyed by them so far".<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Brahi, 1993, 246-7.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, 248.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, 249.

Another human right is the right of equality. The Quran adumbrated its own ideal of human equality in the following verse: "A mankind! We have created you male and female and have made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another. The noblest of you in the sight of Allah is he who is best in conduct " (Sure 49, Verse 13). <sup>30</sup> Thus, the only superiority enjoyed by a human being over other human being is due to his righteous behavior. The same principle was repeated by the Prophet in his address to the Muslims on the occasion of his farewell pilgrimage when he said: "People, your God is one, your father is one. No Arab has superiority over a non-Arab as no non-Arab has superiority over an Arab...except by piety". <sup>31</sup> Thus, it is the oneness of man's origin or nature which enhances equality in Islamic teaching. As far as economic equality is concerned, Islam instituted the system of canonical yearly alms or poor-tax to ensure that no individual falls below a certain minimum of material well-being. The income of this tax was distributed locally to the poor and the needy sections of the region. The Islamic principles of private and public conduct were designed to achieve true ideals such as justice, freedom and equality. All these were mentioned in the Quran and illustrated in the practice of the Prophet.

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<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*, 250.

## 2.2 *Islamic Reformation*

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, European trade missions progressively expanded so that by the eighteenth century many areas of the Muslim world felt the impact of the economic and military challenge of Western technology and modernization. Because Muslim world was declining, a major shift in power-- from Muslim world to the West--occured from that of ascendant expansionism to one of the defensiveness and subordination.<sup>32</sup>

From the beginning of the nineteenth century, all Muslims, including the Ottomans, have been aware of their decline. According to Bernard Lewis, the disastrous failure of the second siege of Vienna (1683) and the Treaty of Karlowitz (1699) were the significant signs of decline in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>33</sup> The elite perceived the cause of the decline in military terms and tried to make reforms in the military. Some reformers argued that European military superiority derived from economic and political rather than military causes. Others identified the sources of Western power as industrialization and constitutional government. In the twentieth century, the Arab failures in the struggle against Israel, from 1948 onwards, revived the great debate on what was wrong with Muslim world like. First, Arabs perceived their failure in military terms. But soon they realized that bigger armies and better weapons did not bring solutions. They, then, began to look for more radical solutions to prevent "corruption in Islamic society". Bernard Lewis has classified those

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<sup>32</sup> Esposito, Straight, 128.

<sup>33</sup> Lewis, "Islam", 90.

who feel that the present systems are corrupted and new institutions must be installed into two groups: the Islamic fundamentalists and the democrats.<sup>34</sup>

I have already discussed fundamentalists at the previous paragraphs. "Democrats", on the other hand, fight for reform in the Islamic lands and claim to represent a more effective, more authentic democracy than restricted or distorted by some intrusive adjective. It is a democracy not nullified by a *priori* religious or ideological imperatives, and not misappropriated by regional or sectarian interests. In part their movement is an extension to the Middle East of the wave of democratic change that has already transformed the governments of many countries in Southern Europe and Latin America, in part it is a response to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the new affirmation of democratic superiority through victory in the Cold War.<sup>35</sup>

Alongside fundamentalists and democrats, there are also reform-minded Muslims who challenged the blind and unquestioned clinging to the past. They think this caused the internal decline of the Muslim societies, their loss of power, their backwardness and their inability to respond effectively to European colonialism. These reformers stressed the dynamism, flexibility and adaptability that have characterized the early development of Islam. They pressed for internal reform through a process of reinterpretation (*ijtihad*) and selective adoption (Islamization) of Western ideas and technology. These

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<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*



ideas were developed in the works of several key figures in the nineteenth century. I now look at some of them.

Jamal Al-Din Al Afghani (1838-1897) was an outstanding figure of nineteenth century Islam and a major catalyst for Islamic reforms. He attempts to bridge the gap between secular modernists and religious traditionalists. He argues that Muslims could repel the West not by ignoring or rejecting the sources of Western strength (science and technology), but instead by reclaiming and reappropriating reason, science and technology. He was an ardent advocate of constitutionalism and parliamentary government to limit the power of the rulers. Central to Afghani's program for Islamic reform was his call for a reopening of the door of *ijtihad*. He tried to formulate new Islamic responses to the changing conditions of Muslim societies.<sup>36</sup>

Muhammed Abduh (1849-1905) argues that the transformation of Muslim society depended on a reinterpretation of Islam and its implementation through rational educational and social reforms. He maintains that while those aspects of Islamic law that governed worship (such as prayer, fasting, pilgrimage) were immutable, those aspects that were concerned with social affairs (such as penal, commercial and family laws) were open to change when the conditions required it. Abduh argues that the core of Islamic

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<sup>36</sup> Esposito, Straight, 130-1.

principles and values should be reapplied to new realities and, where necessary, the old layers of tradition should be discarded.<sup>37</sup>

Muhammed Iqbal (1875-1938), an Indian Islamic modernist, develops his own synthesis and interpretation of Islam in response to the socio-historical conditions and events of his time. Iqbal takes positive aspects of Western culture such as dynamic spirit, intellectual tradition, technology. Iqbal is equally critical of the excesses of the West, such as imperialism and colonialism, and moral bankruptcy of secularism. He turns back to the past to rediscover those principles and values that could be employed for reconstructing an alternative Islamic model for the modern Muslim society. His attempts result in the discovery of Islamic versions of democracy and parliamentary government. Iqbal points to the precedents in Islamic belief which, through reinterpretation, could be used to develop Islamic equivalents to Western concepts and institutions. Iqbal stresses the fact that because of the centrality of such beliefs as the equality and brotherhood of believers, democracy is the most important political ideal in Islam.<sup>38</sup>

Sayyid Ahmed Khan (1817-1898), an Indian Islamic modernist, argues that the survival of Muslim community demands a bold reinterpretation of Islam and the acceptance, and not rejection, of the best in Western thought. He

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<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*, 131.

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*, 142.

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<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*, 131.

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*, 142.

indicates that the survival of Islam depends on avoiding unquestioned acceptance of medieval interpretations of Islam. Survival of Islam also asks for the exercise of *ijtihad* to produce fresh interpretations of Islam to demonstrate its relevance and validity for modern life. He believes Islam is the religion of nature and reason. The word of God and the work of God (nature) are not necessarily in contradiction.<sup>39</sup>

For the modern times, two Middle Eastern philosophers are significant for the Islamic Reformation. One is *Abdul Karim Soroush*, a Shi'ite Muslim from Iran. The other is *Sheikh Rachid al-Ghannouchi*, a Sunni Muslim from Tunisia. These philosophers produced some of the most far-reaching work on the question of Islam and democracy over the past three years.<sup>40</sup>

*Abdul Karim Soroush* was educated in London and Tehran in both philosophy and the physical sciences. Soroush has recently taught at Tehran University's school of Theology.<sup>41</sup>

His advocacy of democracy for the Islamic world rests on two pillars. First, to be a true believer one must be free, because belief under threat or coercion is not true belief. Freedom is the basis of democracy. For Soroush, an Islamic democracy cannot be imposed from above; it is only legitimate if it is supported by the majority, including both believers and non-believers.

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<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*, 138.

<sup>40</sup> Robin Wright, "Two Visions of Reformation", *Journal of Democracy*, 7:2 (Apr 1996), 67.

<sup>41</sup> *ibid.*

Second, argues Soroush, our understanding of religion is evolving. He claims that the revealed text is immutable but it can be reinterpreted. It has been revealed to the heart of the Prophet, and so it should be kept intact and none has the right to change the text. But the interpretation of the text is open to change. No interpretation is possible without presuppositions. Presuppositions are prone to change since the knowledge of mankind is in flux. Thus, no interpretation is absolute or fixed for all times and for all places, but the sacred text should not, still, be changed. In fact, this is how Soroush expresses the situation: "The text is silent. We have to hear the its voice. In order to hear, we need presuppositions. In order to have presuppositions, we need the knowledge of the age. In order to have the knowledge of the age, we have to surrender to change. So we have here the miraculous entity that is changing but at the same time is immutable".<sup>42</sup>

The next broad subject that Soroush addresses is related to the clergy. He argues that in the ideal Islamic democracy, the clergy have no *a priori* right to rule. The state should be run by whoever is popularly elected on the basis of equal rights under law. He thinks that the clergy should be freed so that they are not "captives" forced to propagate official or popular views, other than the faith of Quran. Clerics should work like everyone else, making independent income through scholarship, teaching or other jobs.

Finally, Soroush deals with the subject of secularism. According to Soroush, secularism means developing a critical and scientific approach to

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<sup>42</sup> *ibid.*, 69.

life --which has nothing to do with hostility to religion. Soroush argues that the ancient world was based on a single source of information: religion. The modern world has more than one source: reason, experience, science. Modernism was a successful attempt to free mankind from the dictatorship of religion. Postmodernism is a revolt against modernism --and against the dictatorship of reason. In the age of postmodernism, reason becomes humbler and religion becomes more acceptable. For Soroush, the reconciliation between the two has become potentially more visible.<sup>43</sup> By pointing the way to innovative interpretations of the Quran and the Sharia, Soroush provides a foundation for a pluralist and tolerant society.

Rachid Al-Ghannouchi is a popular philosophy teacher and speaker who finished his education in Damascus and Paris. Ghannouchi founded the *Mouvement de la Tendance Islamique* (MTI) in 1981 during a brief interlude of Tunisian political liberalization. But Tunisian government refused to legalize the MTI. Ghannouchi persisted in calls on the regime to share power by introducing political pluralism and economic equality. He was jailed in 1981. When he was released in 1984, the government did not let him teach, speak in public, or publish.<sup>44</sup>

In 1987, Ghannouchi was again arrested and charged with plotting to overthrow the government. He was released after a bloodless coup in

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<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.*, 71.

November 1987, which led to another brief political thaw. The MTI, renamed al-Nahda in early 1989 to remove religious overtones, was promised a place at the political arena. But by the time of the April 1989 legislative elections, the thaw was over. Ghannouchi was sentenced to life-time imprisonment because his party was found guilty for plotting the coup. In 1993, British government granted him political asylum.<sup>45</sup>

Ghannouchi advocates an Islamic system that features majority rule, free elections, a free press, protection of minority rights, equality of all secular and religious parties, and full women's rights.

According to Ghannouchi, Islamic democracy is primarily the product of scriptural interpretation. In one of the several interviews held between 1990 and 1995, he claims that Islam did not propose a specific program concerning our life: "It brought general principles. It is our duty to formulate this program through interaction between Islamic principles and modernity. Believers are guaranteed the right of *ijtihad* (interpreting the Quranic-text). Their empowerment is complete since Islam did not have institution or person as a sole authority to represent the faith. The process of Shura, moreover, means that decision-making belongs to the community as a whole".<sup>46</sup> He argues that the democratic values of political pluralism and tolerance are perfectly compatible with Islam.

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<sup>45</sup> *ibid.*, 73.

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.*, 71.

Next, Islamic democracy is also a product of recent human experience. The legitimacy of contemporary Muslim states is based on liberation from modern European colonialism, a liberation in which religious and secular, Muslims and Christians participated together. For Ghannouchi, there is no room to make distinctions among citizens; complete equality is the base of any new Muslim society. The only legitimacy is the legitimacy of elections. Ghannouchi said that freedom comes before Islam; it is the step leading to Islam.<sup>47</sup>

Ghannouchi calls the act of striking a balance between the holy text and human reality '*aqlanah*' which is translated as "realism" or "logical reasoning". *Aqlanah* is dynamic and constantly evolving. As a result, Ghannouchi, like Soroush, believes that Islam and democracy are an inevitable mix.

Ghannouchi's acceptance of pluralism is not limited to the Islamic world. Responding to Samuel Huntington's widely discussed essay on the "Clash of Civilizations", Ghannouchi contends that cultural or religious differences do not justify conflict, but instead can provide ground for cooperation rooted in mutual recognition of complementarity. "We appeal for a dialogue between Islam and the West, for the world now is a small village and there is no reason to deny the other's existence," he claimed in a 1994 interview.<sup>48</sup>

Of course one should be aware of the fact that the "liberal" interpretations of a few Islamic reformers are not sufficient for the

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<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*, 74.

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*



reconciliation of Islam and democracy. In fact, these reformers are challenged by some critics, including Muhammed Arkoun. He calls these philosophers as "Muslim apologists", who misread the history by reading it backwards. He claims that they sought to counter Europe-centeredness with Islamic-centeredness, perpetuating the idea that there is a single Islam with a single, superior, exclusive capacity for generating truth.<sup>49</sup> Still, these Islamic reformers' attempts are important steps toward the reconciliation of Islam and democracy.

Similarly, Wright<sup>50</sup> notes that the Islamic reformist movement has a very long way to go. Although there are other philosophers who also think that Islam and democracy are compatible, Islamic reformers, still, constitute a distinct minority. Their efforts to promote democracy in Muslim lands may experience bumps, false starts, and failures, and these may take a long time. Yet, the Islamic reformation in question represents the best hope for a reconciliation both within Islam, and between Islam and the outside world.

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<sup>49</sup> Muhammed Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam*. ( San Francisco: Westview Press, 1994), ix.

<sup>50</sup> Wright, " Reformation", 75.

## CHAPTER III

### ISLAM AND DEMOCRACY IN TURKEY

As noted before, after the Gulf War, political liberalization and democratization came to the agenda and became an important question in the Middle East. The unquestioned assumption that Islam and democracy are incompatible has also been mentioned. In the 1990s, the increasing power of Islamic movements and their unexpected success in the elections of countries such as Egypt, Pakistan, Algeria, Jordan and Turkey forced us to reconsider the debate over compatibility of Islam and democracy. We have to again address the question of whether political Islam can be reconciled with democracy. Those who respond to this question affirmatively argue that moderate Islamic opposition should be allowed to compete in a democracy. This would enable the integration of the opposition into the system. And within the system, they would become even more moderate. Those who respond to this question negatively argue that if the Islamic opposition had the opportunity to compete in a democracy, first they would play the game according to rules but if they capture power, they would become authoritarian. Those who do not believe the compatibility of Islam and democracy argue that "democracy is not one man, one vote, once".<sup>1</sup>

The recent success of the Prosperity Party (PP) at December 1995 general elections brought the issue of the compatibility of Islam and

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<sup>1</sup> Sabri Sayarı, "İslam, Laiklik ve Demokrasi (Türkiye Örneğinde Perspektifler)" in İslam ve Demokrasi. (İstanbul: TÜSES Yayınları, 1994), 135.

democracy to the political scene. Should they be trusted to form the government ? Could they destroy the system when they come to power ? Or, if given the chance to form the government, would they integrate into the system and function smoothly ? To answer these questions, one should investigate the relationship between democracy and Islam in Turkey. Turkish case is crucial for the issue of the compatibility of Islam and democracy because as Bernard Lewis has noted "of the forty-six sovereign states that make up the International Islamic conference, only one, the Turkish Republic, can be described as a democracy in Western terms ...".<sup>2</sup> Turkey represents a unique case within the Muslim context because the secularization process in Turkey has been a cumulative process whereas in the Middle East secularization process is a cyclical pattern of ebb and flow between secularist and Islamic trends.<sup>3</sup>

What makes secularization process unique in Turkey is the "state-dominant nature of Turkish political culture".<sup>4</sup> The Ottoman state was an "Islamic state" but the influence of religion was limited. Ottoman rulers had sovereign powers through which they could issue laws and regulations that were not based on Islamic precedents (örf-i sultan-i).<sup>5</sup> By the nineteenth

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<sup>2</sup> Bernard Lewis, "Islam and Liberal Democracy", Atlantic Monthly, 271 (Feb 1993), 89.

<sup>3</sup> Metin Heper, "Islam, Polity and Society in Turkey: A Middle Eastern Perspective", Middle East Journal, 35 (1981), 363.

<sup>4</sup> İlkey Sunar and Binnaz Toprak, "Islam in Politics: The Case of Turkey", Government and Opposition, 18 (1983), 421.

<sup>5</sup> Heper, "Islam, Polity", 347.

century, these bureaucratic elites adopted a basically secular and state-oriented tradition, called “adab”.<sup>6</sup> Şerif Mardin argues that there was an inherent tension in Ottoman rule which was made up of Islamic and bureaucratic components. The Ottoman state was both “Islamic” and “bureaucratic”. It was “Islamic” in the sense that Islam was the religion of the state. In addition, the Sultan’s primordial role was that of the caliph, the leader of the Islamic community. It was “bureaucratic” because Ottoman officials worked for the preservation of the state. By the middle of the eighteenth century, the bureaucratic style became dominant.<sup>7</sup> This perpetuated the autonomy of the state vis-a-vis religion.

Before the middle of the nineteenth century, in theory, the law of the land in the Ottoman Empire was the Sharia, religious law based on Quran. With the inception of the Tanzimat (Reform) era (1839-1876), the bureaucratic elites introduced new administrative institutions and economic incentives; a new administrative law and a rationale for administration were brought about. Reason was going to be the criterion in promulgating policies. With these changes, the prestige and the position of ulema (Doctors of Holy Law) were undermined: they were given marginal roles in administration, the judiciary, and the educational system.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the secular reforms of the

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<sup>6</sup> Metin Heper, “ The State, Religion and Pluralism: The Turkish Case in Comparative Perspective”, British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies, 18 (1991), 40.

<sup>7</sup> Şerif Mardin, “ Religion and Secularism In Turkey “ in Atatürk: Founder of A Modern State, Ali Kazancıgil and Ergun Özbudun (eds). (London: C. Hurst & Company, 1981), 194.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, 196.

nineteenth century were possible because of the relative autonomy of the political sphere and its legitimation on grounds other than religion, also because of the construction of a strongly structured and differentiated state.<sup>9</sup>

Sultan Abdulhamid II (1876-1909) demonstrated how Islam can be utilized as a political formula. Believing in science and its practical applications, Abdulhamid II opted for the use of Islam as a lever which would instill some consciousness of a collective goal into his subjects. By establishing contacts with sheiks and dervishes (using religious orders), Abdulhamid II tried to get the Arab population to develop loyalty to the Ottoman state. In fact, he attempted to forge an identity among rural masses in order to give meaning to their allegiance to caliph. According to Mardin, this intelligent policy is meaningful to understand Atatürk's attitude toward Islam.<sup>10</sup>

A new type of social thinking which envisions society in terms of both an abstract model and a blueprint for the future emerged in the 1880s. But, this did not operate effectively until the Young Turk Revolution of 1908. The Young Turks were not able to avoid from working within the mosaic structure of Ottoman society, various ethnic and religious groups, and with Islam as the thin thread keeping the population of the Ottoman Empire together. Because of their scientific utopian worldview, they were critical toward the

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<sup>9</sup> Ali Kazancıgil, "Democracy in Muslim Lands: Turkey in Comparative Perspective", International Social Science Journal, 128 (1991), 347.

<sup>10</sup> Mardin, "Secularism", 200-1.

use of Islam as a “raiser of consciousness”. Ziya Gökalp, one of the Young Turks, tried to find an alternative to Islam. He focused on two ideas: nation and civilisation. His blueprint for the future was to draw out the latent Turkish culture of the Turkish nation, to establish a Turkish state based on it, to accept Western civilisation, and to make Islam a matter of conscience.<sup>11</sup>

With the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the World War I and the loss of Arab lands, part one of the Islamic formula-- to integrate Arabs into Ottoman identity-- lost its relevance. When the Allies tried to impose the terms of the Treaty of Sevres which aimed to partition Turkey, Atatürk resorted to Islam in order to maintain national unity when he was organizing resistance against it. During the War of Independence (1919-1922), the Islamic discourse was used to mobilize the masses--part two of the Islamic formula. The war was presented to the peasantry by pro-Atatürk local notables and religious leaders as *jihad*, holy war.<sup>12</sup>

With the foundation of the Republic (1923), the source of authority was designated as the nation before anything else. As Islam was perceived an obstacle to modernization, Islam-oriented culture was substituted by a new secularist culture. Thus, between 1922 and 1924, Atatürk undertook an impressive number of reforms such as abolishing the sultanate, the caliphate and the office of Şeyh-ül İslam (religious authority) and Sharia courts. Next,

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<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, 208.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, 208.

the Article Two of the 1924 Constitution that designated Islam as the state religion was abrogated. Religious orders and the fez (head gear for men) were outlawed between 1925 and 1930. In addition to these measures, the Directorate of Religious Affairs was established. This institution was saddled with the task of interpreting and executing an enlightened version of Islam. The Directorate was staffed by civil servants. The purpose behind creating such an institution was not to separate spiritual realm -religious- from the temporal realm -state, but rather through institutionalizing Islam, control religion.<sup>13</sup>

According to Paul Dumont, there are two Islams in Turkey: one is the “official Islam” which applied to all the structures over which the state exercises to various degrees its direct control; the other one is the “free-lance Islam” which corresponds to the world of sects, brotherhoods, associations and groups of all kinds that escape from the authorities’ control, and appear all the more dangerous as they are clandestine, and deprived of a clear profile and an officially defined religious program.<sup>14</sup> Thus, during the Republican period, there was a twofold strategy toward Islam. One was repressive (suppressing Sufi tarikats because they were perceived as threats

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<sup>13</sup> Ümit Cizre Sakallıoğlu, “Parameters and Strategies of Islam-State Interaction in Republican Turkey”, International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies, 28 (1996), 235.

<sup>14</sup> Paul Dumont, “Islam As A Factor of Change and Revival in Modern Turkey “ in Turkic Culture: Continuity and Change, Sabr M. Akural (ed). (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Turkish Studies, 1993), 1.

by the ruling elite; the other was accommodative (utilizing Islamic symbols to gain popular legitimacy).<sup>15</sup>

With the official Islam, the Republican elite tried to transform religion into a modernizing factor through a vast range of reforms so as to put Islam at the service of the new ideas that the Kemalist Revolution wanted to implant.<sup>16</sup> Even the aim of religious instruction in the schools was to form not only good Muslims, but also by means of this renovated religion, good citizens, true patriots and zealous workers who would adapt their personal and social life to the evolution of the modern world (using religion for secular aims). Henry Fischer claimed that "Islam, in Turkey has become a slave-of-all work of the state", used to serve the policy of modernization, social transformation and economic development.<sup>17</sup>

On the other hand, the Kemalist state tried very hard to suppress free-lance Islam. This has also contributed to the free-lance Islam's reactionary nature during the Republican era; there was hostility toward the Republican regime and Kemalist Reforms. This hostility was reflected in the uprisings that took place in the 1920s and 1930s. At this point, the bureaucratic elite decided to pursue an even more "militant secularism".<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Sakallıoğlu, "Parameters", 236.

<sup>16</sup> Dumont, "Islam As", 2.

<sup>17</sup> Henry Fischer, 1932, 69.

<sup>18</sup> Feroz Ahmad, "Politics and Islam in Modern Turkey", Middle Eastern Studies, XXVII (1991), 8.



The transition to multi-party politics (1945) ended the strict policies of secularization of the single party-period. Some observers characterized this period (1950-1960) in Turkey as a time of "Islamic resurgence" or "revival".<sup>19</sup> The relaxed attitude of the Democratic Party (DP) toward Islam played a significant role here. But as Ümit Cizre Sakallıoğlu states, the so-called Islamic revival did not pose a challenge to the system. In fact, what the DP did was to introduce voluntary religious courses into primary schools, reestablish the call to prayer in Arabic, increase the number of İmam-Hatip Lycees (preacher schools). By pursuing such policies, the aim of the DP was not to establish an Islamic state, but to respond to the demands of the rural masses.<sup>20</sup>

The "resurgence" of Islam in this period was marked by the stepped-up activities of religious orders and groups such as the Ticani and Nurcu, by increasing activity of the voluntary religiously-oriented service organizations and by the publication of a large religious literature. The DP had instrumental and pragmatic reasons for having a conciliatory attitude toward the "revival" of Islam. The alliance between peripheral Islam and the DP was a bargain made for mutual benefit: electoral support for the DP, tolerance toward religious groups.<sup>21</sup> That is why we cannot label the period between 1950-1960 as a period of resurgence of Islam.

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<sup>19</sup> Sunar and Toprak, "Islam in Politics", 429.

<sup>20</sup> Sakallıoğlu, "Parameters", 237.

<sup>21</sup> Sunar and Toprak, "Islam in Politics", 430.

As Binnaz Toprak and İlkey Sunar have put it, the important thing about this period (1950-1960) was the beginning of a new politics whose net impact was the instrumentalization of Islam by the DP for electoral purposes.<sup>22</sup>

With the military coup on 27 May 1960, the Democrats were overthrown. The military regime (1960-1961) introduced the 1961 Constitution which opened up a liberalization period with the widened scope of liberties. There are two important aspects of this period. First, the liberal atmosphere of the 1961 Constitution enabled the establishment of a religiously-oriented political party. Second was the revival of the legacy of "Atatürk's rationalist positivist appraisal of the mass appeal of the state-interpreted version of Islam".<sup>23</sup> Cemal Gürsel praised Islam to secure the political and moral legitimacy of the military regime and to check against any reactionary upsurge using Islam. During the War of National Liberation the state-building elite had behaved similarly.

The Justice Party (JP), heir to the DP, had a secular outlook toward religion. As Sakallıoğlu has noted, the JP formulated and resolved the question of the political role of Islam as follows: first, the party-based legitimacy of the political system was set on popular sovereignty. Consequently, Islam disappeared from the public sphere. Because of the liberal-Westernist stance of the military, while not radically departed from the periphery-oriented traditional discourse of the DP, the JP sought a more

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<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*, 431.

<sup>23</sup> Sakallıoğlu, "Parameters ", 238.

secular-liberal identity which would have an impact on the form and substance of its policy toward Islam. Thirdly, the JP used Islam against Communism.<sup>24</sup> Thus, the JP pursued policies toward Islam which did not conflict with the goals of secularism and modernization.

It was in 1969 that the first explicitly religious political party was established in the Republican history --the National Order Party. The party was disbanded by the Constitutional Court a year later for violating the law on the organization of political parties which forbade the exploitation of religion for political purposes. In 1972, the party was reestablished as the National Salvation Party (NSP). Although the party had an Islamic discourse, its approach was somehow different from the discourse of the 1950s. Earlier, the Islamist worldview, as preached by the Nurcu and other orders, had encouraged political quietism by teaching that this world was a field to be sown for the next world.<sup>25</sup> In the discourse of the NSP, there was a call for activism.

The NSP was a neo-Islamic party whose major concern was the political retraditionalization of Turkish culture along Islamic precepts. By emphasising rapid industrialization, the NSP placed this concern within a modernist context. In the NSP view, Turkey had a distinguished imperial past which was attributable to its success in combining military power with the building of an Islamic civilization. The "National Outlook" (Milli Görüş), the NSP's "ideology",

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<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, 239-240.

<sup>25</sup> Ahmad, "Politics and Islam", 12-13.

promised a country which would be fully industrialized through economic cooperation with the Muslim world, the prerequisite of which was a return to Islam as the basis of social organisation.<sup>26</sup> The NSP appealed to masses who were badly hit by rapid economic growth, and the world economic crisis of the 1970s. In terms of its constituency, the puritan language of the NSP combined with anti-capitalist rhetoric and emphasis on populist social justice enabled the party to draw support from what Şerif Mardin has called "the men of the bazaar", particularly the small merchants and artisans.<sup>27</sup> Thus, the voice of the party is not the reaction of the tradition but the protest of those who wanted a large political and economic role in the expanding world of modernity.<sup>28</sup>

The NSP had also a strong tarikats (religious order)-based support, especially from the Nakşibendis. But the Nakşibendi support did not last long. When the NSP formed a coalition government with the Republican People's Party in 1974, tarikats blamed the NSP for being coopted by the political system and withdrew their support from the party.

Although the NSP was not very successful in the elections (it received 11,8 percent in 1973 and 8,6 in 1977 elections), it made contributions to the political participation in Turkey. Peripheral Islam, for the first time in

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<sup>26</sup> Binnaz Toprak, "The State, Politics and Religion in Turkey", in State, Democracy and Military: Turkey in the 1980s, Metin Heper and Ahmet Evrim (eds). (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 1988), 125.

<sup>27</sup> Sunar and Toprak, "Islam in Politics", 436.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, 438.

Republican history, found in the NSP an institutionalized and organized voice in the national life of the country and the halls of the Grand National Assembly.<sup>29</sup> The NSP filled the void of a belief system that would compensate for the feeling of loss that the individuals experienced as a result of republican reforms and rapid urbanization. That is why, in the 1970s, there were some attempts by secular official circles to put emphasis on Islam.

Since the military intervention of 1980, state policy toward Islam has changed. Official discourse articulated and tolerated Islamic elements in the public realm that had until that point been under the monopoly of secular standards and criteria.<sup>30</sup> Attitudes regarding secularism were softened. Religious instruction in primary and secondary schools were made mandatory by the 1982 Constitution. Kenan Evren, Chief of the General Staff who led the 1980 military intervention, and who was president from 1982 to 1989, justified his various exhortations to adopt "modern" ways of doing things by making references to some verses in the Quran.<sup>31</sup> The socio-political activities of the religious orders which had been banned in 1925, reached peak levels. The members of religious orders penetrated all ranks of political society. The Süleymancı and the Nakşibendi orders were allowed to run unofficial Quran

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<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, 441.

<sup>30</sup> Sakallıoğlu, "Parameters", 44.

<sup>31</sup> Heper, "The State, Religion", 51.

courses and youth hostels. The publications of religious orders have mushroomed.

In 1983, a new neo-Islamic party, the Prosperity Party (PP) was founded as the successor party to the National Salvation Party which was closed after the 1980<sup>2</sup> military intervention. Reminiscent of the "National Outlook" of the NSP, the PP calls its ideology "National Consciousness" (Milli Şuur). It defines national development as a combination of material and spiritual welfare. By spiritual development, the PP understands a return to indigenous sources of culture and interprets the modernization efforts of the last two hundred years as a failure.<sup>32</sup> What is needed is a new consciousness which will place material wealth under the umbrella of higher values. The PP promises prosperity and wealth without the familiar pains of rapid industrialization. The PP's appeals for social welfare, social justice and political freedom can be interpreted as attempts to reach civil servants and workers as supporters. In fact, rising Muslim bourgeoisie who find a little chance for social mobility, also, support the PP. The NSP was mostly made up of small merchants, traders and artisans.<sup>33</sup>

In the 1980s, the PP, still, had limited electoral support. In the 1984 local elections, the PP received 4,4 percent of the votes; in the 1987 parliamentary elections 7,2 percent; in the 1989 local elections 9,8 percent of the votes. This may be partly attributed to the diversity of Islamic groups and platforms

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<sup>32</sup> Toprak, "The State, Politics", 128.

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*, 129.

expressing different interests, and priorities. While some religious orders have chosen to operate within the existing party spectrum (the PP was rumored to have connections with the followers of the late Nakşibendi skeikh Mehmet Efendi, Süleymançis were assumed to have connections with the Motherland Party (MP), and the Nurcus were known to support the True Path Party (TPP) as they previously supported the JP and the DP), there is a radical fundamentalist movement which refuses to engage in party activity. This movement sees party politics as a cooptation and confines itself to intellectual pursuits.<sup>34</sup>

The split of the previous NSP support between the PP and the MP is another factor of limited electoral support of the PP. The post-1980 civilian governments of the MP shared the military's vision of reconstructing the relationship between the state and society so that religion would be controlled by the state. The NSP clique within the MP was headed by the party's vice-president Mehmet Keçeciler. Turgut Özal, himself, was known for his religiousness as well as affinity with the NSP. Technical elites within the MP tried to develop a synthesis between Islamic values and pragmatic rationality through reconciling the former cultural orientations with the requisites of economic growth and Western democracy.<sup>35</sup> Thus, the MP mobilized Turkey's traditionally conservative constituencies and some Islamic

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<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*, 130.

<sup>35</sup> Nilüfer Göle, "Towards An Automization of Politics and Civil Society In Turkey ", in Conflict and Consensus in Turkish Politics: Dilemmas of Transition to Democracy, Metin Heper and Ahmet Evin (eds).

platforms around the cause of economic liberalism. And in this process, they integrated them with the existing order.<sup>36</sup>

In the 1980s, Islam became a vehicle for the youth to protest against the military regime, especially in a period when politics was forbidden to students. Female students insisted on veiling (türban) in the classroom. The religion-state relationship in the 1980s downgraded the diffusion or success of radical Islam that aimed to alter the legal and prohibitionist framework of political system through incorporation of Islamic platforms and voices to the political system. Consequently, the recent visibility of Islam in Turkey does not pose a threat to the functioning of democracy. The revival of Islam in Turkey has traditionally not been an increase in the force of the “religiosity”, but in the scope of religiosity which means that the range of social contexts within which religious considerations are regarded as having more or less direct relevance increased.<sup>37</sup>

The previous chapters mentioned the hostility of Sufi tarikats toward the Republican regime. Today, it seems that the situation has drastically changed. Although Ticanis and Süleymancis are known to be anti-republican and anti-modernist, there are other orders which display remarkable adaptability to the present-day conditions. The Nurcus can be given as an example. The Nurcu (disciples of light) movement was led by Said-i Nursi

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<sup>36</sup> Sakallıoğlu, “Parameters”, 247.

<sup>37</sup> Heper, “Islam, Polity”, 363.



(1873-1960), a Nakşibendi sheikh of Kurdish origin. His works were printed in small booklets under the generic title of *Risale-i Nur* (message of light). Said-i Nursi argued that law of science is one of the greatest qualities of "a good Muslim".<sup>38</sup>

The typical Nurcu as s/he appears in the commentaries of Said-i Nursi is not only endowed with a positive spirit but is also a good republican, and even a man relatively receptive to the principles of laicism. In his work on the Nurist thought, Safa Mürsel, author of a monumental work on the philosophy of Said-i Nursi, does not hesitate to state that Said-i Nursi opposed theocracy and moreover was a convinced supporter of a Republican and pluralist democracy, which he considered as the only governmental form in conformity with the principles of Islam. Mürsel argues that Said-i Nursi considered the ideal state as the one guided by the teachings of Muhammed; but in the absence of such an Islamic government, Said-i Nursi recommended a regime based on laicism, that is a total freedom of thought and religion, excluding any state control of the spiritual life of the citizens.<sup>39</sup> In fact what said-i Nursi tried to do was to keep faith in private sphere. That is what Fethullah Gülen means when he talks about saving the individual identity.

It can be said that the Nurcus, though respectful to Islamic principles, constantly tend to redefine them in the light of the changes in the modern

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<sup>38</sup> Dumont, "Islam As ", 8.

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*, 10.

world.<sup>40</sup> Because of their tendency to compromise and equilibrium in their ideological trends, Nurcu philosophy should be defined as “moderate fundamentalism”.<sup>41</sup> Here, what is meant by “fundamentalism” is the attempt to change the existing system and establish an Islamic state.

The comments above, on the Nurcu movement and Said-i Nursi, have been made to indicate two important facts. First, one can observe that Said-i Nursi's thoughts are parallel to those of Abdulkarim Soroush and Rachid Al-Ghannouchi. As mentioned before, Soroush argues that the reconciliation of Islam and democracy is inevitable; in Muslim societies if one is absent the other will not exist. Also, Ghannouchi attempts to protect minority rights, recognizes equal rights for women, and supports free elections.<sup>42</sup> Fethullah Gülen, follower of Said-i Nursi, shares the views of Soroush, Ghannouchi and represents a similar stance toward Islam and democracy.

Secondly, generally, in today's context, people tend to view Islam as an element of the traditional society system. Also, Islam is usually perceived as a factor that slows down change-led modernization. But what has been told up to now shows that Islam has actively contributed to the process of change which has been developing in Turkey since the 1920s.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *ibid.*, 11.

<sup>42</sup> Şahin Alpay, “Ufuk Turu”, Milliyet, 1 August 1996.

<sup>43</sup> Dumont, “İslam As”, 13.

# CHAPTER IV

## ISSUES RELATED TO FETHULLAH GÜLEN'S VIEWS

### ON

### ISLAM AND DEMOCRACY

Fethullah Gülen\* is, in today's Turkey, the leader of one branch of Nurcu movement, called Fethullahcıs (though he does not like his group to be called "Fethullahcıs" because he does not consider himself as sheikh). He is a former civil servant as prayer leader and preacher. During the 1980 military intervention (1980-1983 period), his name was seen in the "wanted" list of the military regime. Before the 1990s only those who were interested in religious movements knew about Fethullah Hoca and his group. In the 1990s, he became widely known, especially because of his critical attitude toward the Prosperity Party (PP). The extended web of colleges in the Central Asia, Fatih University and Asia Finance Institution were the attempts of Fethullah Hoca group which contributed to Fethullah Hoca's public appearance.

After the March 27 1994 local elections, with the unexpected electoral success of the PP --by obtaining 19,7 percent of the votes, won 29 municipalities<sup>1</sup>--- some people became anxious about the further increase in the PP's votes in the future because they conceived this success as a threat

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\* Popularly known as "Fethullah Hoca". Thus, in the following discussion, I will call him Fethullah Hoca.

<sup>1</sup> Hakan Yavuz, "Refah Partisi: Modernleşmenin İçinde, Batılılaşmanın Dışında; Sistemin İçinde, Hükümetin Dışında", Türkiye Günlüğü, 38 (Jan-Feb 1996), 49.

against the system. When following the December 24 1995 general elections the PP came to power as a coalition partner, the PP obtained the plurality of the votes, 21,4 percent and won 158 chairs in the parliament<sup>2</sup> ; that the “secularists” fear reached its peak, and a secularist-fundamentalist polarization has emerged. That is why from the beginning of 1995, Fethullah Hoca became a person who was widely discussed in Turkey. He was made known through the interviews held by leading national newspapers (Milliyet and Sabah). In those interviews emerged a calm, modest figure, who by saying “my nation” and “my state” shows to what extent he is respectful to the state, who is an admirer of Picasso and who does not hesitate to say that “Nazım is also the offspring of this country”.<sup>3</sup> By drawing such a profile and presenting a “moderate” Islamic approach that is at peace with the secular order, which is in contrast to the political Islam of the PP, Fethullah Hoca has been appreciated by the secularists who are anxious about the PP’s political Islam-based rise in the 1990s. At this point there is an ongoing debate about whether Fethullah Hoca may contribute to the reconciliation of democracy and Islam through his moderate approach to Islam. Here it is necessary to investigate the issues related to Fethullah Hoca’s conception of democracy and Islam.

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<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Ömer Laçiner, “Seçkin Bir Geleneğin Temsilcisi Olarak Fethullah Hoca Cemaati”, Birikim, 77 (Sept 1995), 9.

#### *4.1 Tolerance Versus Fanaticism*

Fethullah Hoca's conciliatory or tolerant worldview is quite significant.

He sees his mission as gathering different groups at a common ground and teaching them to be respectful for the others' rights and thoughts. On fanaticism, Fethullah Hoca's views are as follows: " fanaticism and intolerance should be given up; what we should do is to accept everyone as s/he is. The problem should be solved through dialogue, reason, rationality and at the heart. We live in a world of dogmas and fanaticism. It is true that in the history of Islam at some time and in some places, dogmas carried the day. But this was found unsatisfactory and dogmas were given up".<sup>4</sup>

He argues that the concepts of "secularism" and "sharia" should not be perceived as insults, otherwise there would be polarization among the people. He meets political and religious leaders and tries to establish a dialogue among them. One such attempt is the " Hand in Hand for the Happy Days " Conference held by the Journalists' and Writers' Foundation on October 1, 1996 to which several artists, businessmen, politicians and religious leaders attended.<sup>5</sup> Fethullah Gülen is the spiritual leader of the Foundation. Especially Fethullah Hoca's meeting with Fener Rum Patriarch Barthelomeos should be appreciated for being the harbinger of tolerance and civility. Because this is the first meeting of a civil community leader with a Christian religious leader after the proclamation of the Republic. This indicates the fact that "Official

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<sup>4</sup> Eyüp Can, Ufuk Turu. (İstanbul: AD Yayıncılık, 1996)

<sup>5</sup> Zaman, 2 October 1996.

Islam“ is being transcended. Muslim-Christian, religious relations are canalized to their natural processes.

#### *4.2 Being a Muslim In Turkey*

Fethullah Hoca has developed the notion of “being a Muslim in Turkey”, which seems to contradict the universal character of Islam. He contends that without harming the universal character of Islam, Turkey succeeded in developing a moderate interpretation of Islam. According to Fethullah Hoca, one of the sources of Turkish culture is Islam, second one is the quality of being a Turk originating from Asia, and still other is the mysticism, the divine side of Islam. Toktamış Ateş, a “Kemalist” author who writes in İstanbul daily Cumhuriyet claimed that this notion of “being a Muslim in Turkey “ is a concept of Fethullah Hoca which for many years he has been writing on and supporting.<sup>6</sup> Ali Yaşar Sarıbay evaluated Fethullah Hoca’s Islam as “religious nationalism”.<sup>7</sup> According to Fethullah Hoca, Turkish Islam differs from the Islam practised in such Muslim countries, as Iran and Saudi Arabia, because in Turkey Islam has been incorporated to democracy and secularism. In fact, he goes further and claims that Turks did not take Islam from Arabs. He explained this claim in his words as follows: “Those Muslims living in Turkey had not taken the source of their Islam directly from Mecca or Medina. This thought may disturb some people. The Central Asia became

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<sup>6</sup> Can, Ufuk Turu, 189.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, 169.

Muslim in the 50th anniversary of Mohammed's emigration to Medina. In the first century of Mohammed's emigration, significant Muslim personalities had emigrated from Türkmenistan and Afghanistan to Mecca and Medina.

İsmail Hami Danişment indicated that at the time of emigration of significant personalities, suddenly a thousand tabernacle of Turks become Muslim. It is said that Ebu Hanife was a Turk. İmam Buhari and İmam Müslüm were the personalities who had hadith-books and who lived in the Asia. Hermeneutics, hadith, interpretation were brought from Asia. In the 4th and 5th anniversary of the emigration of Mohammed, they -hadith, hermeneutic and interpretation- were trusted to the Little and Great Seljukian and were inherited to the Ottoman Empire. Not directly, but the origins of Islamism went to the Asia and there, they were regulated, those parts open to interpretation were interpreted. Again, those Muslim personalities evaluated the interpretation basis of Islam. They made a lot of analogies. They chose the mystic path which can be claimed as the spiritual life of Islam. Those dervishes, then, came to the Little Asia- Anatolia. There may be some parts of Hadith, Fiqh, Islamic constitution which are latent. But there are some other parts, such as istihsana (an auxiliary law source according to Hanifa jurists, meaning that one prefers close interpretation to open one or prefers an exceptional degree to a general one), istishab (maintaining the existing legal situation) which are open to interpretation and these were also interpreted by Turks.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Sabah, 23 November 1997.

Whether it be Islam, Christianity or Judaism, at a period when there is no sea trade, there may be verses, hadiths about sea trade. But one can not consider a world that he does not know. One should make investigation on this matter and integrate it into system.

Modern interpretation shows us the existence of several verses in the Quran and hadiths about the modern sciences. That is why the interpretation is very important. So it can be said that at different parts of the world -three-fourth of majority of Islamic world- the Hanifa understanding and Turkish nation's interpretation dominate. One can call it Turkish Islamism with its parts open to interpretation.<sup>9</sup> Fethullah Hoca says that Ahmet Yesevi, Mevlana, Yunus Emre were the representatives of this tradition.<sup>10</sup>

Fethullah Hoca evaluated the situation about the political and religious belief lived in Middle Eastern countries in the following words: "In Turkey, we have freedom of thought, freedom of expression. It is not possible to find such an environment of freedom either in Southern Iraq or in Saudi Arabia. Because Saudi Arabians urge people to go to mosques. It is not acceptable to urge people to conduct the divine service in a mosque. You should explain people and persuade them to do something. Worshipping requires will or volition. For this reason, a person who is mentally-ill is not responsible to God.

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<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Yeniyüzyıl, 11 November 1996.



So I do not approve of Islam practised in the Middle Eastern countries".<sup>11</sup>

Fethullah Hoca is discontent with the Islamic image constructed by the fundamentalists according to which "if a person does not share your views, you cut off his head, and then everybody will live and think like you".<sup>12</sup>

Fethullah Hoca argues that the tolerant attitude in Turkish culture and the mosaic structure of the empire (diversity of the ethnic and sectarian backgrounds of the people in the empire) had a positive impact on the practice of Islam in Turkey. People in Turkey are open to change. The other Muslim peoples did not have any connection with the outer world, so they live isolated and have closed lives. This had a negative impact on their Islamism; they are fanatics. Fethullah Hoca told that he had many Muslim friends in Australia, and the Arab world who are fanatics because they struggle over the details of Islam which are secondary in importance. For instance, Fethullah Hoca takes the turban (başörtüsü) issue as a detail ('furuat'). He claims that "those who bring the turban issue to the agenda should respect to those who do not veil".<sup>13</sup> Fethullah Hoca had also criticized the turban movements of the 1980s in the universities by saying that such movements were not compatible with Islam.

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<sup>11</sup> Sabah, 24 January 1997.

<sup>12</sup> Can, Ufuk Turu, 32.

<sup>13</sup> Yeniyüzyıl, 11 November 1996.

Being heir to Said-i Nursi who attempted to reconcile the aim of secular schools, where education is based on positive science and aim of madrasas where education is based on religion, Fethullah Hoca proposes a marriage between secular and religious schools which he called as "the marriage between the school and the madrasa".<sup>14</sup> This will be achieved through preservation of faith in private sphere. He emphasizes the need to follow the methodology of positive sciences. Related to this, he disapproves the hostility against the West because he is aware of the fact that such hostility will make us remain behind the times. He tries to get rid of things which make Islamic world inferior in comparison to the Christian world. This is the modernized form of Jamal al-Din Afghani's views. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Afghani was a moderate gradualist reformer who prefers educational and legal reforms to sudden violent action. He introduced rationalist view into Islamic philosophy. He thinks a reopening of door of interpretation of law and doctrine could lead to a Protestant type of reform in Islam. This is important because Islamic reform is the prerequisite to the acceptance of modern science and technology. Fethullah Hoca states that our national feelings and thoughts should be in line with the requirements of the age. Of course, the essence and the identity of Turkish nation should be preserved, but with the globalization, we must come up with new policies. That is why he thinks the integration with the West is inevitable.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Can, Ufuk Turu, 75.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, 45-46.

#### 4.3 Turkish Nationalism

On every occasion, Fethullah Hoca emphasized his loyalty to the state and to the nation. Hakan Yavuz argues that the Nurcu movement, under the leadership of Fethullah Hoca was being nationalized and being brought under state control.<sup>16</sup> According to Yavuz, these processes are related to “Dadaş soul” whose main characteristic is its acceptance of state’s primacy over religion. Around Erzurum and Bayburt regions, the state is thought to be the prerequisite for the preservation of Islam.<sup>17</sup> This is an Islam that one can come across at the boundary regions where the inhabitants are frequently threatened and sometimes occupied by other religious power centers; thus, an approach which perceives the existence of the state obligatory for the preservation of the nation and Islam exists among the people living in those regions. One can call this approach state-centric understanding of Islam.

Ömer Laçiner claims that Turkish Republic recently defined itself as a nation-state made up of precisely Sunnite-Turks or of the segments who are converted to being a Turk. The rest is conceived as minority.<sup>18</sup> Thus, according to Laçiner, the media held a campaign -through interviews- to prevent the rise of the PP at the center of which Fethullah Hoca stands. Laçiner argues that in fact, the purpose of this campaign is to make the

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<sup>16</sup> Şahin Alpay’s interview with Hakan Yavuz in Milliyet, 3 August 1996.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Laçiner, “Seçkinçi”, 9.

Turkish nationalism legitimate and formal by the state and the center-right <sup>19</sup> ; Fethullah Hoca is used against the legitimacy crisis lived in Turkey because of PKK (illegitimate terrorist organization) and Kurdish question in the 1990s. In short, it is an effort to raise Turkish nationalism as the main concern of political order.

#### *4.4 Educational Mobilization*

The most significant activity of Fethullah Hoca and his group is educational mobilization. The Central Asia is selected as the pilot area for this purpose. In Özbekistan and Türkmenistan, a gigantic education army was established. In Özbekistan, there are seventeen secondary institutions with 3,343 students and 209 teachers and one language center. In Türkmenistan, there is one university with 293 students and twenty-eight Turkish staff members; thirteen secondary education institutions with 2,694 students and 163 Turkish teachers, one language center with eighty students and seven teachers.<sup>20</sup>

The aim of this education campaign is not to transfer religious knowledge to those students in Özbekistan or in Türkmenistan; but to achieve a change in the morality of the students. This is what Said-i Nursi proposed in his Risale-i Nur in the name of "human project", that is nurturing "persons with

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<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Ali Bayramoğlu, " Orta Asya'daki Türk Misyonerleri ", Yeniyüzyıl, 31 October 1996.

high morality”, or good Muslims. According to Said-i Nursi, in the core of faith stands morality and individual, religious symbols are one part of it. This is the first step in the project. Second step is the marriage between faith and science which was mentioned before. This marriage is considered to be the framework that circumscribes faith, action, donation feelings because it is directed both to the Islamic and to the non-Islamic, to the requirements of the age and the great “ ideal”, that is to compete and to cope with the things that do not belong to the West and to Islam in order to protect the purity of Islam. Thus, the aim of the Central Asia model education is to create a powerful Turkey which will be able to compete with the West in terms of scientific and technological developments.<sup>21</sup>

The approach that frames this education campaign has its roots in a historical Islamic model, that is tradition, materialization (dünyevileştirme), personal Islamic understanding, the relation between the national and the religious, the relation with the state.

The education in the Central Asia is said to be a secular one. A group of Turkish journalists, joined a trip to Özbekistan which was arranged by Zaman newspaper, between 20-28 October in 1996, appreciated this gigantic education web, and they reported that they were pleased to see that it is a secular education whose curriculum is similar to colleges and “science lyceés” in Turkey. Some, who are not convinced with this report, have still an anxiety about the content of the education. Whether this education model, that is

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<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*

based on a project to bring up “ individuals with high morals” is democratic or not is debatable. What is clear is that there exists a different Islamic project, a different society model developed by the Fethullahcıs. What are the basic dimensions of this model ?

First, the project places its emphasis on the individual rather than society to communicate Islam. Fethullah Hoca thinks that perhaps because Turkish people are the grandchildren of a militarist generation, there is a little inclination toward improving individualism. If it is not something related to generic heritage, Turkish people should be incited to think freely and to gain his/her individual identity. He claims that Islam has an individualist approach to each person. What he tries to say is that when an individual reaches his/her maturity, s/he will learn how to live in a society automatically. For Fethullah Hoca, the militarist heritage of Turks is the most crucial obstacle that stands in front of improvement of democratic culture. In an interview made with him by Nevval Sevindi, a journalist writing for a daily, Yeniyüzyıl, Fethullah Hoca points to the difficulty of blossoming individualy. For him, this is the reason why people prefer to take shelter in communities.<sup>22</sup> Second, it is a project which aims at providing the Muslim with mundane knowledge and power derived from this knowledge. Thus, it encourages a war of science. Thirdly, it is a project to complement Islamic concern with action; an investment is made to bring up good Muslims. A good Muslim is defined with good presentation of

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<sup>22</sup> Yeniyüzyıl, 28 July 1997.

the person who communicates. For a good presentation, there are two basic requirements: faith and science. Fourthly, a good and true presentation includes the local and the national as it also makes references to the traditional patterns of behavior.<sup>23</sup> There is a fact that in a conjuncture where religion-society theme is questioned, this leads to different conflicts; it is possible to find the causes of materialization which is inspired from both "örf-i" and "şer-i" traditions. One can observe this in the Central Asia model.

The members of the Fethullah Hoca group have different motivations to work in the schools in Özbekistan and Türkmenistan. Merchants, on the one hand, have profit motivation, and on the other hand, they have motivations of donation, faith and gazza. Educators' work for the sake of bringing up individuals with "high morals". They have also career motivation. This is what is called "sameness in difference" (aynılık içinde gayrılık).<sup>24</sup> In other words, in this scheme while the core becomes materialized, there are also autonomous but legitimate interrelated aspects. This model is the inevitable consequence of the attempt to adopt Islam to the contemporary age. The project is inspired by both tradition and interpretation and, thus, it protects the transcendental characteristics of the religion.

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<sup>23</sup> Ali Bayramoğlu, " Said-i Nursi'nin Geri Dönüşü ", Yeniyüzyıl, 1 November 1996.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*

#### 4.5 Democracy

Fethullah Hoca's interpretation of Islam creates a fertile ground for democratization efforts in Turkey. In one of interviews made with him, he said that: "there will be no return from the road of democracy neither in Turkey nor in the world.... democracy is a reality of humanity, an outcome of historical process ".<sup>25</sup> Fethullah Hoca argues that it is not right to think that democracy is opposite of Islam and Islam is the opposite of democracy. For him, democracy is a system to which all the world has an inclination. However, it is not a perfect system as it is still being improved upon. Democracy is a process of arriving at maturity.<sup>26</sup> Fethullah Hoca has never voted in elections but he advised the citizens who came to the mosque to vote because it is a citizenship duty. Also through political participation, public should be taught democracy.

On 3 July, 1995 Fethullah Hoca who spoke in "Ateş Hattı" (TV programme in TRT I) said that "Atatürk was a military and administrative genius". Thus he highlighted his respect for the founder of Republic who was called as impostor by some RP members who had hostile attitudes toward him.

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<sup>25</sup> Can, Ufuk Turu, 129.

<sup>26</sup> Sabah, 27 January 1995.



Fethullah Hoca's thoughts on democracy, Atatürk, and on Turkey's relations with the West have been welcomed with sympathy by some elite groups. He is a religious personality who is close to center-right parties.

The interviews held by newspapers and the book published by Milliyet, Ufuk Turu, contribute to Fethullah Hoca's visibility. His views on Islamic metaphysics, on life and world of existence from a mystic perspective are appreciated by a lot of writers, journalists and academicians. According to Şerif Mardin, Fethullah Hoca's main contribution is the link he has established between the peripheral conditions and faith. He achieves this through the concept and methodology of a branch of mystic tradition and views, belonging to the scholastic school of Islamic hermeneutics. Fethullah Hoca claims that the way religion emerges in our social life, its massiveness and style are determined by peripheral conditions.<sup>27</sup>

With the help of this view, it becomes easier to accept the norms and institutions dictated by modern way of life. This provides a relief for the society whose ninety-nine percent is Muslim. A view which claims that outside the principles and premises of Islam, religion can be designed according to the very needs of the society and realizes the modernization of public life without changing their existing lifestyle and making it possible for them to claim that they are Muslims.

Fethullah Hoca is not anxious to open such a door to religion because he is a representative of mystic tradition which accepts that it is not possible

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<sup>27</sup> Can, Ufuk Turu, 169.

for the common people to reach the reality. According to this elitist view, there are some people who have special abilities and those people can live a real religious life. There is an agreement that only those people who reach the highest level are not obliged to obey the rules of the Sharia. The other segments who inspired from the highest one obey the structural requirements of Islam but do not accept them as a link between the religion and spiritual reality as common people do. This may seem to create a conflict but this is the distinction between the elite and the masses.<sup>28</sup>

Ali Yaşar Sarıbay claims that the interpretation of Islam by Fethullah Hoca includes both a pragmatic attitude and an attempt to make popular Islamic life-style uncommon. He perceives Fethullah Hoca and his group as urban people, scripturalist, which means that they are the representatives of “elitist Islam”. But paradoxically, Sarıbay thinks that Fethullah Hoca becomes popular. Thus, he makes Islamic life more popular than before.<sup>29</sup>

In Christianity, Protestants played a key role in capitalist mentality’s spreading in the society. Laçiner argues that Fethullah Hoca plays a similar role in Turkish society. Fethullah Hoca provides a divine legitimacy to those neo-liberal entrepreneurs. Thus, he is criticized by Mehmet Şevket Eygi for his resemblance to Protestant devout of Christian world who is fed by the trade partnership. Eygi explicitly stated that “Risale-i Nur should not be abused by

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<sup>28</sup> Laçiner, “ Seçkinici “, 9.

<sup>29</sup> Can, *Ufuk Turu*, 170.

trade".<sup>30</sup> Prof. Dr.Arif Ersoy, one of the writers of "Just Order Programme", criticized the integration of religious groups with the economic system by saying that "efforts to reconcile Islam and capitalism has increased. Some try to find verses that are appropriate for capitalism".<sup>31</sup> Without any restraints to their economic initiatives, the followers of Fethullah Hoca can realize every requirement of capitalist and neo-liberal system. Spiritual and divine premises of Fethullah Hoca will protect them from any criticism that may be directed to their visible (zahiri) existence style. Not only those economic elite but those political elite who because of their status must do things that seem to be incompatible with Islam, can consider themselves as Muslims.

Laçiner argues that Fethullah Hoca proposes a master plan to the elite that aims at creating the "grandeur" of the ancestors in accordance with the contemporary era's requirements. To quicken this process, he tries to carry the educational and indirectly investment activities which take place in a Sunnite-Turk geographic area from Adriatic to China Rampart. The success of these activities depends on good and effective relations between Turkey's mature elites and a state which functions systematically. This is the dream of Fethullah Hoca which is interesting for the elite who are bored up with the political patronage of the center-right parties.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Kemal Can, " Kapitalizme Uygun Ayet Aranıyor", Ateş, 2 November 1996.

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Laçiner, "Seçkinici ", 9.

It is not something new that those elite who rule and guide the society, take up these religio-mystic approaches seriously. What Fethullah Hoca refers to when he talks about “ancestors” is a tradition in the Ottoman Empire to which the high status elite, Muslim notables and enlightened people held in high esteem.<sup>33</sup> Even the most tyrannical viziers stood most respectfully in front of the sheikhs, respectfully listened to their advice and believed that in such a way they cleansed up their souls.

It is important to note that Fethullah Hoca did not even say a word about common people, only he advised them to be loyal to the state.

According to Sarıbay, Fethullah Hoca’s pragmatic attitude that consists of his rejection of the hostility against the West, his search for commonalities to provide a fertile ground for dialogue and the attempt to merge Enlightenment and madrasa in a college form has a function of inner-secularization of Islam. For Sarıbay, secularism is not to show tolerance to different religions, but it is the search for different interpretations in the same religion in order to find a common ground for compromise through tolerance.<sup>34</sup> This is what Fethullah Hoca tries to do.

Fethullah Hoca and his group’s voice have made the importance of interpretation (tefsir) and its relation with the dynamics of age apparent; thus they legitimized the existence of different interpretations of Islam. All these highlight the pluralist characteristic of Islam. In the framework of these views

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<sup>33</sup> ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Sabah, 26 August 1995.

which accept the existence in the society of different Islamic or non-Islamic groups as natural, those voices like Fethullah Hoca's will be the tools of reform, that, is the adaption of Islam to the era through interpretation.

## CHAPTER V

### FETHULLAH GÜLEN VERSUS NECMETTİN ERBAKAN'S PP ?

In the previous chapter, I have delineated the issues related to Fethullah Hoca's views on Islam and democracy. To understand why many people treat the PP as a threat to the existing order but take Fethullah Hoca and his group as an antidote to the PP, we need to address the question of what are the differences between Fethullah Hoca's views and those of the PP.

When Turkey moved from the 1980s to the 1990s, a polarization between the radical secularists and radical Muslims became more apparent. The strengthening of political Islam and the rise of the PP increased the sensitivity on the issue of secularism. At the same time, Islamic wave was increasing its popularity and it has gained a cultural weight that goes beyond its lines. In his article "Devlet İslamı İstiyor" (The State Wants Islam), Ruşen Çakır argues that Islamic culture, or religiousity, discourse should be considered as the part of culture at the center. At the first look, it is not something new. The Republican generation often heard from their grandfathers that they should ignore those bearded-fanatics, and that they themselves were the real Muslims. This is a Republican culture that confined worship to the "mahrem" (confidential). Such a distancing was in conformity with the foundation ideology because in the talk about religiousity, there was still an emphasis on secularism. But today what we see at the centre is an

Islamic culture which is a part of the popular identity and which places emphasis on religiousity when talking about secularism.<sup>1</sup>

From the 1980s onwards, one can observe the rise of Islamic identity. It emerged in a context in which Kemalist nationalist discourse was facing a serious identity crisis with its will to civilization no longer capable of limiting the imagination of political community within the horizon of modernity.<sup>2</sup> The search for a community both outside the terrain of and as a response to the Kemalist will to civilization has become and continues to be one of the significant sites of that has formed and still gives meaning to Turkish politics in the 1990s.<sup>3</sup> At this point, there emerged a need for a social figure, a symbolic personality/ community as a solution to this crisis.

The views about the PP, which increased its votes by the help of those who protested the system, has gradually changed; particularly when the PP became the coalition partner. The PP is not thought to constitute a threat to the system as it did before. (In fact, the number of people who do not share this view is not negligible). Still, personalities, groups or communities who/which will integrate the Islamic views, principles more moderately into the system, and help the existing order function smoothly are preferred. These

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<sup>1</sup> Ruşen Çakır, "Devlet İslamı İstiyor", Birikim, 55 (Nov 1993).

<sup>2</sup> Fuat Keyman, "On the Relation Between Global Modernity and Nationalism: The Crisis of Hegemony and The Rise of (Islamic) Identity In Turkey", New Perspectives On Turkey, 13 (Fall 1995), 113.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, 114.

moderate personalities and communities will make it possible to moderate those who are outside the Islamic community.

A leader who will dissipate tension in the politics by uniting the cultural center, who will not challenge the order, who will not irritate the Republican culture -though representing the gains of Islamic culture- is searched for. Fethullah Hoca seems to be the most appropriate candidate for this mission.

It can be claimed that the educational mobilization carried out by Fethullah Hoca group, a civil societal initiative, takes its power from Islamic and communal traditions specific to Anatolia. This civil mobilization stands as an antidote to “cultural breakdown” ideology which is supposed to feed political Islam. This last point brings forth the first difference between Fethullah Hoca and his group on the one hand, and the PP and Erbakan on the other to the scene.

### *5.1 Political Islam versus Cultural Islam*

The most significant difference between Erbakan -and the PP- and Fethullah Hoca group is the former's representing political Islam whereas the latter's representing cultural Islam. The Journalists' and Writers' Foundation whose spiritual leader is Fethullah Hoca has been compared with the PP by some columnists as follows: “The foundation presents a pure Muslim alternative to the PP which carried political Islam to the power. This foundation represents a platform which stands against the radicals who reinforce a clear-cut distinction between those supporting the PP (“Muslims”) and those not



and those not supporting the PP ("secularists" or "pagans").<sup>4</sup> At the centre of the platform in question stands Fethullah Hoca.

The PP's main political aim is to grasp power, for this reason they compete in the elections. They are willing to use and exploit the opportunities that a self-proclaimed democratic system, by its own logic, is bound to offer them.<sup>5</sup> After 24 December 1995 general elections, Erbakan declared that people wanted to see the PP in the government. He added that democracy means conforming to what the masses demand. Erbakan said: "I know Demirel very well. He will do what a democracy requires. He will give me the duty of establishing the government as the leader of a party which obtained the majority of the votes in the elections".<sup>6</sup>

In contrast, Fethullah Hoca's movement is a social movement whose aim is to reconstruct the daily life of Muslims. In an interview made by Ali Bulaç, Fethullah Hoca was asked whether he will block the PP's political Islam and/or he will be an alternative to the PP. Fethullah Hoca's answer was as follows: "Those brothers in the PP come up with the same allegation against us. But the arena they chose for service is different from ours. They prefer to be in active politics. This is a view and an interpretation. We cannot have any objections to their choice or preference. But the arena of activity which we find

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<sup>4</sup> Şeref Oğuz, " Kökten Hoşgörücüler ", Milliyet, 2 October 1995.

<sup>5</sup> Bernard Lewis, " Islam and Liberal Democracy ", Atlantic Monthly, 271 (Feb 1993), 90.

<sup>6</sup> Hürriyet, 26 December 1995.

appropriate is education, the mission of bringing up auspicious people. In the educational institutions we have established, we try to bring up persons with high morals. Thus, different activities and different arenas to serve should be considered as a division of labor. To answer your question, no religious community can be an alternative to the other. We do not constitute an obstacle to the PP, we do not have such an intention".<sup>7</sup>

Erbakan seems to have a view parallel to that of Fethullah Hoca. He was also asked if Fethullah Hoca can be an alternative to the PP. Erbakan replied: " Fethullah Gülen is tried to be brought to the agenda deliberately to block the PP. But Fethullah Gülen is also a person among us".<sup>8</sup> Still, one may speak of the latent power struggle between Fethullah Hoca and Erbakan.

Fethullah Hoca is against the political Islam of the PP. This is evident in his claim that politicizing Islam is the biggest insult toward religion. In an interview with Yalçın Doğan at the TV channel "Kanal D" on 17 April, 1997 Fethullah Hoca blamed the PP and Erbakan for causing damage to the regime and the religion. He went further and said that there is not any spiritual tie between Erbakan and him. There is, in fact, an incompatibility between their souls because Erbakan politicized Islam. When a religion is politicized, Fethullah Hoca continued, this will result in the exploitation of politics for the politicians' self-interest. At the same time, religion will degenerate; politicians may claim that they are the representatives of the religion. That is why,

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<sup>7</sup> Ali Bulaç, " Fethullah Hoca'ya Üç Soru ", Yeni Şafak, 12 July 1996.

<sup>8</sup> Milliyet, 27 February 1995.

although he often met with Yılmaz, Çiller, Ecevit, Demirel, and Türkeş, Fethullah Hoca did not meet with Erbakan.<sup>9</sup>

Fethullah Hoca once said: "Unfortunately we see the adverse results of the politicization of Islam". He thinks that the PP accelerates the process of polarization in the society. For him, secular-religious polarization creates a major problem for Turkey. In contrast to political Islam represented by the PP, Fethullah Hoca is the champion of a moderate Islam which is compatible with the secular order.

In the same TV program, Fethullah Hoca irritated the PP members of parliament, the ministers and the media supporting the PP by asking the Refah-Yol ( Prosperity-Path) coalition government to resign. He claimed that those who are in power then do not perform well enough to govern Turkey. So, they should admit that they have failed and they should give the trust back to the people. He gave examples from Hz. Ebubekir (one of the four caliphates) and Ömer Bin Abdülaziz who returned to the people the trust by declaring that their burden had become too heavy for them. This is a significant example of Republican, democratic perception of government.<sup>10</sup> Fethullah Hoca also criticized Erbakan and the ministers of the PP for their

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<sup>9</sup> Milliyet, 18 April 1997.

<sup>10</sup> Gündem, 18 April 1997.

"ihram" (seamless garment worn by pilgrims in Mecca) show-off at Ankara's Esenboğa Airport.<sup>11</sup>

Fethullah Hoca gave support to the 28 February 1997 National Security Council (NSC) decisions which the PP were unwilling to apply. About the NSC, he said: " the duty of the NSC was designated in the Constitution. If they say that they are for protecting the security of the country and if they perceive a threat to the security of the country, we cannot blame them".<sup>12</sup> Fethullah Hoca emphasized the appropriateness of the NSC decisions and stated that "The military have power: weapon. If that weapon were in the hands of other people, they would have intervened. But as the military is loyal to democracy, they do not do this. The government should not insist on not applying the decisions of the NSC ".<sup>13</sup>

Fethullah Hoca also supported the eight-year-uninterrupted secular education which is not accepted by the PP members. He stated : "This problem can be solved by reaching a consensus. Those who want can send their children to school of theology. Half of the students who go to the Faculty of Theology come from the other "secular" lycees. One can go to the school of preachers and prayer leaders after finishing the secondary school".<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Milliyet, 18 April 1997.

<sup>12</sup> Hürriyet, 18 April 1997.

<sup>13</sup> Milliyet, 18 April 1997.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*

Fethullah Hoca frequently emphasizes that he is not involved in politics; he claims to be above and beyond politics. Thus, when he met with Tansu Çiller, this created a scandal. A discussion went on between Mehmet Şevki Eygi, a writer in the PP's semiofficial newspaper Milli Gazete and Taha Kıvanç (Fehmi Kuru), a writer in the Fethullah Hoca's newspaper, Zaman, because of Fethullah Hoca's assumed rapprochement with the True Path Party. Fethullah Hoca argued that it was not a political meeting.

The recent events, Fethullah Hoca's criticisms about the PP in the Yalçın Doğan's TV program, his call for the government's resignation, his support for the NSC again brought into question Fethullah Hoca's claim that he is not involved in politics. According to Ömer Laçiner, Fethullah Hoca and his group have a larger political aim than the PP and/or the other centre-right parties.<sup>15</sup> That is why Laçiner thinks that the difference between the PP and Fethullah Hoca is not related to whether Fethullahcıs prefer to be out of politics or not. Although both sides indicate that this is the foremost significant difference between them, Laçiner thinks that this does really not reflect the reality.

For the PP, the goal of politics is power, like all other political parties. Whatever change it proposes in its party program, they will not change their basic political goal. It promises to bring about an economic, political and social order which is based on Islamic premises and which will be realized through

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<sup>15</sup> Ömer Laçiner, "Postmodern Bir Dini Hareket: Fethullah Hoca Cemaati", Birikim, 76 (Aug 1995), 10.

power. This is the thought shared by those who want to live an Islamic style of life freely and who see the state as an obstacle to that aim.

Fethullah Hoca and his group also want to be powerful, but they do not aim at creating a dominant Islamic style of life. Then why do they want to be powerful? They want to be powerful for getting rid of things which made Islamic world inferior in comparison to the Christian world. As noted before, this is the modernized form of both Jamal al-Din Afghani and Said-i Nursi's views.<sup>16</sup> Fethullah Hoca and his group do not hesitate to borrow from the West in science and industry which Said-i Nursi defined as material. In fact this is a modernist attitude.

These views are not, of course, alien to the PP because it does not promise only an Islamic life style to Muslims but also promises a powerful Turkey which will challenge the power of the West. From the 1970s onwards, Erbakan came up with a program of heavy industry attempt and recognized the need to be powerful. What differentiates Erbakan and Fethullah Hoca is their perception about the conception of power. Whereas Erbakan perceives it as an infrastructure problem, Fethullah Hoca perceives it as a problem of cadres. Fethullah Hoca does not deny the importance of infrastructure problem but he assumes that the establishment of an elite cadre which will consist of people who are skillful and have refined knowledge in all sectors, is more urgent than the heavy industry. For him, bringing up a group of elite who

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<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, 5.

will constitute the web of managing and directing is the prerequisite of power. These words will support his argument: "We ask to those who want to change the state : Do you have an alternative state in mind? If there will be instability, you should not destroy the state before providing an alternative".<sup>17</sup> It is obvious that for Fethullah Hoca and his group, the PP does not constitute an alternative state.

One may now better appreciate why Fethullah Hoca and his group try to expand the gigantic organization they have developed for education. These schools are the places to bring up elite cadres. Other religious communities which establish educational institutions for donation chose the poor to attend their schools whereas in the schools established by the Fethullah Hoca group, some very difficult tests are applied to students before they are admitted. The selected students are the ones who are the most successful in the national and international scholarly achievement tests.

According to Laçiner, Fethullah Hoca's attempt is a postmodern religious movement which is a mixture of Turkish nationalism, traditional political Islam, neoliberal thesis under the second industrial revolution's elitist powerful state/society project. Laçiner argues that the PP is a modern movement. Although it mentions "Shariah" when it makes references to the state and society, it gets its content through modernity. It thinks within the context of modernity, with its concepts and its institutions. So the challenge of

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<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, 11.

political Islam against modernity ended up in internalization of modernity.<sup>18</sup> The Fethullah Hoca group phenomenon is the indicator of the fact that Islamic movement realized this internalization at the beginning of post modern era which indicates that Islamic movement synchronized with the age.

According to Laçiner, for the alternative state to be prepared, there is a need for stability and order which the existing state should provide. Thus, Fethullah Hoca and his group perceive the PP as a threat to the existing order and try to prevent instability in the polity.<sup>19</sup>

Both the PP and Fethullah Hoca group are involved in politics. But they differ concerning methods and strategy they employed for grasping political power; they also have different goals. Furthermore their target groups are different. On these issues, there is consensus in the Fethullah Hoca group but in the PP, there are factions. There is a possibility that some in the PP may give support to Fethullah Hoca group which combines the mystic tradition with an elitist attitude.<sup>20</sup> Fethullah Hoca himself decided that it was time to get out of the cocoon which for many years they have been knitting. He said: "It is time for us to get out of the cocoon. Of course I have doubts about this. But many of my friends told me to go and explain things to the people".<sup>21</sup> One

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<sup>18</sup> Laçiner, " Postmodern", 5.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, 6.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Eyüp Can, Ufuk Turu. (İstanbul: AD Yayıncılık, 1996 ), 18.



should remember that this flight from the cocoon happened to be at the end of 1994, at a time when an election in 1995 seemed to be very likely and the PP seemed to have a good chance at elections. If the PP became the first party in the next elections, they could create a situation such that Fethullah Hoca and his group would have no chance to maintain their autonomy; or the PP could have brought some legal restrictions to the activities of the Fethullah Hoca group. This explains the power struggle between the two- the PP and the Fethullah Hoca group.

As noted, there is a difference in the strategy of the PP representing political Islam and Fethullah Hoca and his group representing the new path. As the PP preferred employing a strategy which appeals to middle class people, they followed a style of propaganda which appeals to middle class people's religious feelings. In the 1990s, in addition to religious factor- especially in metropolises- their discourse included economic and social factors. The PP promised "job, soup, prosperity, security..." to the electorate. This new identity of the party caused a change in the segments of the society from which the PP members receive votes. Those lower class people who were alienated from the system as a result of migration from the rural to urban areas began to vote for the PP. So, there are mainly three segments of society who support the PP. These are: first, middle scale Anatolian merchants; second group consists of those conservative people who try to show their protest about the tension created as a result of modernization

attempts; third group includes people who have no hope for the existing order and support any alternative that promises a radical change.<sup>22</sup>

As noted, in contrast to the PP, Fethullah Hoca and his group try to appeal to the high segments of Turkish society, the economic and political elite. First group of themes in Fethullah Hoca's discourse refers to such things as power, efficacy, imperial vision, Picasso representing refined culture, art themes. This group of themes is related to the prerequisite of their existence, status of the elite or the satisfied masses.<sup>23</sup> Fethullah Hoca claims that they have never attempted to establish a mass movement and benefit from the mass psychology because it brings chaos. Fethullah Hoca thinks that such exploitation would bring many benefits but at the same time the unsatisfied masses will bring destruction. He expresses his view that the way with the unsatisfied masses is an unappreciated way, it is not a Muslim saintway but it is an ambitious way to power.<sup>24</sup> Fethullah Hoca's distinction between the community and society is also meaningful. For him, community is composed of people who share common thoughts and feelings as a consequence of frequent interaction. At the same time, common beliefs bring people together. Those people who believe that fest prayer (Bayram Namazı) is necessary (vacip) cannot escape from meeting in one's mosque. But society is different.

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<sup>22</sup> Naci Bostancı, " RP'yi Anlamak ", Türkiye Günlüğü, 38 (Jan-Feb 1996), 69.

<sup>23</sup> Laçiner, "Postmodern ", 6.

<sup>24</sup> Can, Ufuk Turu, 19.

Of course, people come together to actualize an aim but with whom you live in this society is important. There can be unsatisfied people who do not share common feelings and thoughts. In society, people come together temporarily. There are no continuous bonds among them. It is more appropriate to call them masses who come together for their particularistic interests. They dissolve very quickly.<sup>25</sup>

Second group of themes refers to talks on metaphysics which is ornamented with rich mystic tradition. This group of themes is related to the search of the elite for meaning in such a transitional age.<sup>26</sup> Thus, Fethullah Hoca's discourse is a mixture of these themes prepared to call out to the elite cadre.

What differentiates Fethullah Hoca group from other groups is the importance they give to timing- to do the right thing at the right time and at the right place.<sup>27</sup> It is a detailed strategy, the core dimension of which is patience, waiting until the most propitious point before taking an action. While responding to a question asked about the timing of going to Middle Asia Fethullah Hoca said: "Some went to Russia just before the dissolution happened. In fact our friends had been in Bakü when the dissolution's speed

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<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, 23.

<sup>26</sup> Laçiner, " Postmodern ", 6.

<sup>27</sup> Kozanoğlu, *Internet*, 68.

was accelerated. They had entered the country at the right time”.<sup>28</sup> This strategist approach distinguishes Fethullah Hoca from the radicals.

As noted before, another difference between Fethullah Hoca group and the PP is the former’s being an elitist cadre movement whereas the latter’s being a populist movement. For Fethullah Hoca, the aim of education is to bring up an elite group, a “Golden Generation”, to put his grandeur plan into practice. Ali Yaşar Sarıbay labels Fethullah Hoca group’s perception of Islam as an “elitist Islam”, represented by a group of urban, scripturalist people.

In contrast, as the PP is based on a mass movement; it tries to reconcile the interests of people and carries populist policies. Consequently, it cannot have an elitist attitude.

Recent events may take one to rethink about Fethullah Hoca’s conception of Islam. One may ask whether Fethullah Hoca represents political Islam or cultural Islam. It is true that he does not have any intention of establishing a political party and competing in elections, that is Fethullah Hoca is not involved in active politics. But Ahmet Insel may be right when he argues that by providing a divine legitimacy to entrepreneurs through elitist mystic tradition, Fethullah Hoca’s movement may take the colorings of masonry that also distances itself from politics but tries to expand its influence through

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<sup>28</sup> Can, Ufuk Turu, 17.

positioning its members everywhere. This is a common strategy of politicians who sacrifice today for the sake of tomorrow.<sup>29</sup>

## *5.2 Central Asia Versus Middle East*

There is another difference between Fethullah Hoca and Erbakan. Fethullah Hoca places emphasis on the Central Asia whereas Erbakan focuses his attention on the Middle East. In an interview, when Ali Bulaç asked Fethullah Hoca why he selected to pay attention to the Central Asia, but not to the Middle East, Hoca responded as follows: "With the disintegration of the USSR, the Turkic states were liberated. Timing is very important concerning the Central Asia. This region should not be let go. If Turkish educators and entrepreneurs did not go there, others would have gone and had an advantage in comparison to others. With the appropriate tools and methods applied, it is possible to rehabilitate Central Asian republics and integrate them into the Islamic world."<sup>30</sup> Fethullah Hoca also noted that "because we share a common history, Asian people have more sympathy towards us than the Arabs".<sup>31</sup> Fethullah Hoca indicated that "others tried to set up relations with the Middle Eastern countries. But up to this year, Iraq was closed to them. This year in the Northern Iraq, one college has begun to show

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<sup>29</sup> Ahmet İnel, "Yeni Muhafazakarlık ve Fethullah Hoca", Yeniyüzyıl, 27 April 1997.

<sup>30</sup> Ali Bulaç, "Fethullah Hoca'ya Üç Soru", Yeni Şafak, 13 July 1995.

<sup>31</sup> Can, Ufuk Turu, 61.

activity. The relations with Syria were bad. Neither Tunisia nor Egypt had a will to support Fethullah Hoca's attempt to open up schools. The worst thing about the Middle East is that in Saudi Arabia one cannot even demand to open up schools, because even the schools which were established before, were closed. In addition to this, Arabs think that they know Islam better than the other people. And this feeling of superiority led the Arabs to have condescending attitude toward other Muslims".<sup>32</sup>

Fethullah Hoca accepts Asia as a corridor which will unite Turkey with the Middle East and the Pacific. He claimed that this will be an integration in feelings, thought and faith. Consequently, if such an integration is achieved , later, integration at the states level will be inevitable.<sup>33</sup>

### *5.3 Customs Union (Integration to the European Union)*

Customs Union is another issue on which Fethullah Hoca and Erbakan have different views. When Erbakan is asked "why are you opposed to Customs Union, when, for example, Fethullah Gülen is said to support integration to European Union?", he responds in a sarcastic manner: "Fethullah Hoca has a good intention; he thinks that it will be useful to introduce Islam to Europeans".<sup>34</sup> This is, of course, an evasive answer. In fact

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<sup>32</sup> Bulaç, *Yeni Şafak*, 13 July 1995.

<sup>33</sup> Can, *Ufuk Turu*, 61.

<sup>34</sup> *Sabah*, 6 June 1995.

Erbakan argues that Customs Union - integration with the West- would be harmful to Turkey. Erbakan once said: " Çiller argues that she will carry the mosque near the church. But this is absurd. We should join the Islamic world with 1,5 thousand million Muslims in it".<sup>35</sup> What Erbakan has in mind is a Muslim brotherhood, integration with the Arabic-Muslim countries. His trip to Iran, Libya, Egypt was the first step to realize his dream "Islamic Union". After the confirmation of Turkey's acceptance to the Customs Union, Erbakan said that: "we will tear that rag agreement. When we come to power in eleven days' time, we will not recognize it. Like the Sevr Treaty, we will tear it. We will not let the West colonize Turkey. He went further and criticized Çiller: " A rational person cannot leave the Islamic Union and try to make himself/herself servant to the West".<sup>36</sup> On another occasion, Erbakan declared: "The Rome Treaty was signed near the Pope whose aim is to unite all the European states under one name. They will carry the same passport. In a near future, Israel will join the Common Market. I do not want to carry the same passport with Solomon ".<sup>37</sup>

Fethullah Hoca thinks that with the passage of time our national feelings and thoughts become out of date and lose their effect. Because of globalization, the state should adopt new policies. He is aware of the fact that hostility toward the West will push Turks out of age and in time they will be

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<sup>35</sup> Hasan Cemal, " Erbakan Hoca Çok Keyifli", Sabah, 6 June 1995.

<sup>36</sup> Sabah, 4 December 1995.

<sup>37</sup> Cumhuriyet, 24 December 1989.

eliminated from the global order. He says: "Before the Customs Union, I had some doubts about integration to the European Union. Because at that time the experts of economy, academicians thought that Turkish society was not ready for such an integration. My doubt was that an assimilation could happen. Because we were passing through difficult times. But from that day to today, a rapid and uninterrupted change occurred. Both in Turkey and abroad, Turks moved closer to their spiritual roots. Under such circumstances, the integration of Turkish society to the West could take place. If Turkey maintained its own dynamics, beliefs and pursued a reasonable policy, it would not lose anything when the integration was achieved".<sup>38</sup> It was for this reason that Fethullah Hoca complained about Erbakan's Arabization policies; he had doubts about the wisdom of Erbakan's trip to Nigeria, Libya and Iran immediately after he became prime minister. According to Fethullah Hoca, this would have harmed Turkey's relations with the West, especially with the United States. In fact, Fethullah Hoca evaluated the project of the PP about the cooperation with the Islamic countries unrealizable. He states that the conjuncture in the world is not convenient for such a cooperation because each of those Islamic countries is dependent on the Western countries and neither Saudi Arabia nor Iran are the exceptions. Thus, if the Western countries do not approve such cooperation, Islamic countries can not put it into practice. For Fethullah Hoca, D8 (a project which aims at uniting the

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<sup>38</sup> Can, Ufuk Turu, pp. 45-6.



Islamic countries) is proposed as a cheap message for some people to cast their votes to the PP.<sup>39</sup>

#### *5.4 Fethullah Hoca Group, PP and Nationalism*

Fethullah Hoca has a nationalist, centricist and statist approach. In his memoirs, he has indicated that his first political action started in Erzurum by founding the Association for the Struggle with Communism.<sup>40</sup> A keen nationalism which was mainly found in the Nationalist Action Party and one that originated from "Dadaş soul" dominated the whole discourse of Fethullah Hoca claims Hakan Yavuz.<sup>41</sup> Thus, in those regions, there is a state-centric conception of Islam. Consequently, etatism is the natural complementary of Fethullah Hoca's conceptualization of nationalism. However, as Fethullah Hoca encourages free enterprise and tries to empower his community with the help of free enterprise methods, his etatism is not economic but political.

In a world where nationalism and etatism dominate, Islam becomes functional. In such a milieu, Islam becomes a bearer of tradition from which the state and nation originate. This brings the domestication and functionalization of Islam in nation-state tradition.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Yeniyüzyıl, 22 July 1997.

<sup>40</sup> Latif Erdoğan, Küçük Dünyam. (İstanbul: AD Yayıncılık, 1995 ), 142.

<sup>41</sup> Şahin Alpay's interview with Hakan Yavuz, Milliyet, 3 August 1996.

<sup>42</sup> Insel, Yeniyüzyıl, 27 April 1997.

What is the relationship between Islam and nationalism in the PP? The National Salvation Party (NSP)-- the party whose legacy the PP carries-- has had a nationalist-conservative tradition until the 1970s. At the end of 1970, a separate Islamic line emerged; rather than locating Islam in the nationalist-conservative tradition, Islam was perceived as an independent worldview. One part of this attempt was to purify Islam from the traces of nationalism.

At the turn of the century, the tradition of Islamism, which rejected nationalism because it regarded nationalism as racism/tribism, was revived. In 1980s, in addition to the attempts of reviving the traditional "ümmetçi" dream, modern Islamic intellectuals questioned the notions of nation-state and nationalism in the context of modernity.<sup>43</sup>

But the Islamic wave of the 1980s was to some extent inherited by the PP. Also the radical questioning of nationalism by radical Islamism was softened and this soft version was adopted by the PP. Thus, the PP, both in its base and its discourse, did not break away from nationalist-conservative line completely. Still, from time to time, by rejecting to participate in the nationalist ceremonies, they symbolically resisted the official nationalism. It cannot be denied that an implicit conflict goes on between the PP and the official nationalism. The scandal lived in Libya during Erbakan's trip- the Qaddafi scandal- is the most striking example of this political conflict.

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<sup>43</sup> Tanıl Bora, "İslamcılıktaki Milliyetçilik ve Refah Partisi", Birikim, 91 (Nov 1996), 22.

According to Tanıl Bora, it is not the refinement of the PP from nationalism, but it is the different conception of nationalism held by the PP that stands behind this conflict.<sup>44</sup>

The most visible (observable) layer of the PP's nationalism was the potential to hold hostile attitudes against the "other" or the "alien". Hatred deriving from the "national questions" like Cyprus, Bosnia, and the like could easily lead to the use of inflated words such as "blood-lineage-race" -the vulgar examples of racism and chauvinism (here the Greek, the Armenian represent the West, and the hatred was against the West).

The perception of enemy by Turkish Islamism went beyond the perception of enemy by Turkish nationalism because of the enemy configuration at the centre of which the "paganism" factor stood. Because of this factor, they perceived their enemy as incorrigible whereas official nationalism thought they were Kurds, Islamists; this increased the severity of the Turkish Islamism's hostility against their "enemies".<sup>45</sup>

The racism in the Islamic discourse exclusively targets the non-Muslim nations. However, this does not refer to a pure internalization of Islamic nations; the PP's Islamism is Turkey-centered. Because Turkey is considered as the potential leader of the Islamic world and its union. Being an heir to the Ottomans saddles Turkey with that mission. According to the Islamic media,

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<sup>44</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.*, 23.

the Islamic world is aware of the fact that the only country/leader that can rescue Islamic world from humility is Turkey/Erbakan. That is why those humiliated countries expecting to be rescued by Erbakan try to cooperate with him. With this “nationalist” rationale, the ministers and intellectuals of the PP tried to justify the trips to Iran, Libya, Egypt which were highly criticized. Using the Islamic card will make it possible to adopt an international policy which will make Turkey the most powerful in the region. The symbolic example of this justification was the emphasis of Abdullah Gül (one of the ministers of the PP) on the gratification of the Egyptian minister because the roots of his family went back to Turks.<sup>46</sup>

Nationalism is a project of homogenization. The norm of the “unity and integrity” of the Turkish state is what the nationalism in question aim at. Nationalism in the action and discourse of the PP is very much related to this function of nationalism. Because of their desire to integrate with the system, the PP members give much more emphasis on “unity and integrity” which confines the PP to the patterns of current nationalist ideology. In fact, this is more evident in Fethullah Hoca’s conception of nationalism. Just because he concerns with “unity and integrity of the Turkish state”, he never objects to the state. Even he lived difficult times in the 12 September 1980 period, he had never an attempt to struggle with the state. Fethullah Hoca argued that even a bad government was better than anarchism.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> Akşam, 29 January 1997.

The claims of the PP about changing the order seem to cease because of the emphasis given to “unity and integrity”. However, what the PP members have in mind by “nation-state” and “nationalism” concepts is changing the definition of the nation and its perception. The project of the PP can be considered a project of reconstruction of the nation. From this point, we can mention the unique nationalism conception of the PP which is proposed as an alternative to the current forms of nationalism.

The PP emphasizes “true-nation” and “true nationalism”. It is evident that “true”, here, refers to “Islamism”. It is a perception of nation which does not only take Islam as one of the identity dimensions- even though it is the most crucial one- but it uses Islam for the construction of nation as a base that will function as a political-legal orderly arrangement (rabıta). Such a conception of nation, according to Islamic intellectuals, differs from the Western nation-state structurally. The Islamic perception of nation should be sharply distinguished from a “nation” conceptualization which excludes the “sacred” on the secular basis and presents a “constructed society” model. According to Ömer Çelik, Islamic nation should be defined as an “accurate” (true) organic community. “Accurate” or “true” which means that it relies on truly legitimate sources and genuine or pure in quality; organic means natural, a community which exists spontaneously.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Tanıl Bora, “ İslamcılıktaki Milliyetçilik ve Refah Partisi”, Birikim, 91 (Nov 1996), 24.

Tanıl Bora thinks that this conception of nation which is specific to Islam has kinship with romantic and conservative nationalism.<sup>49</sup> Against the nation and nationalism, the message of Islamism was "the true nationalism" that is based upon sacred references. The Islamic discourse, especially the discourse of the PP, exalts the nation which is considered to be sacred community. One common characteristics of the nationalism in question is to praise and glorify the past. The PP's alternative Islamic nation also did the same thing. Thus, Tanıl Bora states that contrary to the reference of sacredness and trueness of nationalism, the alternative nation discourse of Islamism is more convenient to return back to the bosom of the nation.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*, 25.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

One can claim that in recent years Islam has been integrated into Turkish democracy. The successful incorporation of the religiously-oriented has been a consequence of an interactive relationship between Islam and democracy. In the mid-1990s, the leaders of the influential brotherhoods, movements and sects seem to be fairly integrated into the secular democratic state and display more moderate views than before.

In the 1950s, the discourse of the brotherhoods, sects and religious orders was political quietism. During multi-party period, there was a tacit contract between religious brotherhoods and the secularist political parties- "you leave us alone and we support you politically". Today, they take on a more activist role by functioning as lobbies for the economic ventures established by the Islamist groups in several sectors- such as education, construction, banking. Those brotherhoods, sects and religious orders have, in the past few years, tended to concentrate their efforts on providing welfare services for the public which require money. For this reason, since the 1980s, the Islamist sector in the economy has expanded with large-scale holding companies, investment houses, banks and insurance companies. Thereby, they have established strong links with the market economy and the government.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sencer Ayata, "Patronage, Party, And State: The Politicization of Islam in Turkey", Middle East Journal, 50 (Winter 1996), 51.

Yet, one cannot talk about a smooth relationship between the Islamists and the secularists. From the beginning of the 1980s, social divisions have been based on two opposing conceptions of social and political order: the Islamist versus the secularist. It is the issue of secularism which polarizes the society. In fact, the problem occurs as a result of the irreconcilable attitudes on both sides. As Fethullah Hoca told there exist fanatics both on the side of the Islamists and the secularists. What the radical Islamists want is to establish an Islamic state like in Iran. They perceive anybody who is against their desire as enemy. On the other side, the radical secularists perceive Islam as the antonym of Enlightenment and equate any kind of preoccupation with Islam as the road to the irrational.<sup>2</sup> At this point, one can claim that the tolerant stance of Fethullah Hoca may contribute to the amelioration of the relations between the radicals on both sides. Then, let us see how far Fethullah Hoca may advance on the road to the reconciliation of Islam and democracy in Turkish context.

The re-interpretation of Islam by Fethullah Hoca constitutes a support for consolidation of democracy in Turkey. At this conjuncture, the views of Fethullah Hoca which carry much more importance are, as indicated in the previous chapter : democracy, tolerance, being a Muslim in Turkey.

Fethullah Hoca's meeting with Fener Rum Patriarch Barthelomeos should be appreciated for its being the harbinger of tolerance and civility

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<sup>2</sup> Metin Heper, " Islam and Democracy in Turkey Toward A Reconciliation ?", Middle East Journal, (Jan 1997).



because it is the first meeting of a civil community leader with a Christian religious leader after the proclamation of the Republic. This indicates that "official Islam" is being transcended. Muslim-Christian, religious relations are canalized to their natural processes. Fethullah Hoca argues that the most important thing for the well-functioning of a society is dependent on tolerance. He adds that tolerance can only be achieved with love of science and of man.

Fethullah Hoca has developed a notion "being a Muslim in Turkey". The contribution of this concept is that the freedom and plurality-oriented Anatolian Islam stands against Islamists who try to imitate those Arabic countries in using Islam for the establishment of a separate authoritarian regime through ideologizing it. Fethullah Hoca evaluates Iran's interpretation of Islam as fanatic. That is why he thinks Turkey can never be an Iran regarding the establishment of an Islamic state because the interpretation of Islam by Iranians and Turks are different. He thinks the source from which they took Islam also differs. The crux is that Fethullah Hoca does not believe that the religion- Islam is one. He claims that culture of a nation plays a key role in re-interpretation of Islam. The Iranian people do what the region they are living in require. Fethullah Hoca argues that in that region, it is not possible to establish a rule that is not based on religion. But for the Iranians, the most crucial thing is Ali (the leader of Shiites), rather than Quran. For instance, Iran exports a fanatic and sect-based understanding of Islam under the name of religion and Islamic revolution. They give primacy to their sect over the religion-Islam. That is why they are always reactionary to the societies which

mostly consist of the Sunni groups. For Fethullah Hoca, their reactionary nature prevents them thinking and deciding rightly.

Fethullah Hoca and his group's voice shows the importance of interpretation and its relation with the dynamics of age. Emphasizing the pluralistic character - existence of several different understandings and groups within Islam- of Islam, Fethullah Hoca reveals the fact that Islamic communities in Turkey should be considered as an essence of civil society. Ali Yaşar Sarıbay argues that Fethullah Hoca's emphasis on the plurality of commonalities for the dialogue, his point on the war of dogmas, his rejection of useless Western hostility constitute the basis for an inner-secularization of Islam.<sup>3</sup> By providing, inner-secularization of Islam, Fethullah Hoca is rasping the radical parts of Islam; therefore, moderation, admiration for Kant -that is to Enlightenment thought- may be the characteristics of him that may contribute to the consolidation of democracy in Turkey. That is why the secularists should not use his discourse, which includes the elements of modernity, to deal with the legitimacy and meaning crisis. In fact, Can Kozanoğlu calls Fethullah Hoca a "new-age learned person " who makes a by-pass operation to deadlocks in Turkish politics; so he thinks Fethullah Hoca is proposed as a figure to come up with solutions for the meaning and legitimacy crisis.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Can, Ufuk Turu, 170.

<sup>4</sup> Kozanoğlu, İnternet, 85-6.

However, Fethullah Hoca's worldview should be evaluated as a praxis which tries to incorporate Islam into democracy.

These are the contributions of Fethullah Hoca, as the leader of a civil societal initiative to consolidation of democracy in Turkey. This is one side of the medallion. The other side is about the criticisms about Fethullah Hoca.

What are the criticisms that can be made about Fethullah Hoca ? The main criticism is his excessive emphasis on etatism and nationalism. In terms of cultural and ideological continuity, Fethullah Hoca insists on the significance of nationalism and etatism; on the other hand, he conceptualizes Islam in relation to tradition -the tradition should bear Islam and Islam should diffuse in tradition. This constitutes a dilemma that will affect Fethullah Hoca and his group adversely in terms of his contribution to democratization. Because Fethullah Hoca emphasizes the ideological continuity of Kemalism, he is dragged to a conservative position and this damages Fethullah Hoca's modernity (carrying the society to the future) claim. Ali Bayramoğlu indicates that in this country what stands as an obstacle in front of cultural continuity is ideological continuity, that is strong etatism and centralization.<sup>5</sup>

It is interesting that Fethullah Hoca did not hesitate to say that every person who was from Erzurum was pan-Turanist when he was born. That is why when he was asked his views on Said-i Nursi, he states: "It is a manifestation of fate that Bediüzzaman (refers to Said-i Nursi) is from the

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<sup>5</sup> Ali Bayramoğlu, " Cemiyet ile Devlet Arasında", Yeniyüzyıl, 2 November 1996.

Southwestern part of Turkey. But I was interested in him for the sake of religion. Even Hz. Muhammed came from the Arabic nations. This must have its rationale, inner meaning. From time to time, I have different feelings (negative) about Bediüzzaman, but I repressed them".<sup>6</sup> Here, Fethullah Hoca regrets Bediüzzaman's having a Kurdish origin. In fact, these words indicate that he even regrets Hz. Muhammed's having an Arabic origin. Thus, one can extrapolate that Fethullah Hoca has an exclusionary attitude toward those non-Turkish people.

One criticism about Fethullah Hoca is that although he claims to be above and beyond politics, recent events (his call for the Prosperity-Path coalition government to resignation, his declaration of his views about the NSC openly) indicate that he is very much involved in politics. This is a danger for Fethullah Hoca and his group. That is, if his group extends its effect from cultural world to political world, this will bring a deadlock, risk of losing its civil character and politicize cultural and social functions more than need which Fethullah Hoca claims to avoid himself. What is disappointing about this, is a loss of pluralism, civility, debate, religious reform in Turkey.

The other criticism about Fethullah Hoca is his authoritative attitude within the group. His understanding of democracy is based on leader's authority. Although he has a wide philosophical dimension, his community has no philosophical and aesthetic dimension.<sup>7</sup> This is very much related to his

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<sup>6</sup> Sabah, 29 January 1997.

<sup>7</sup> Hakan Yavuz, Milliyet, 3 August 1996.

elitist approach and his group's centricist structure. For Fethullah Gülen, the crisis people in the world experiencing today is the result of three things: first one is the incapacity of the leaders who rule in the world, second one is the management of economic life by those who are not knowledgeable about economics, and third one is wasteful expenditure. For this reason, Fethullah Hoca's solution is a powerful leader, an elite cadre consisting of people who are expert on economic life and a disciplined public who work hard and spend a little.<sup>8</sup> Ruşen Çakır argues that if Muslims cease to perceive democracy as a bogey man (man who frightens children), there will be demands for the inner-community democracy.<sup>9</sup> A group from the governing elite in Süleymançıs challenged the unquestionable authority of Kemal Kaçar (leading figure of Süleymançıs) and separated themselves to organize another group. A similar example can be given from the Yeni Asya (one branch of Nurcus) group. The leading managers and journalists in Yeni Asya group protested the autocratic attitudes of the owner and the leader of the group, Mehmet Kutlular. These are the signals of the search for democracy in the religious communities. At least, these events prove that the conventional performance of the community begins to be questioned in the 1980s. Thus, we can claim that these efforts may have a commitment to civil society and democratization.

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<sup>8</sup> Ahmet Insel, "Altın Nesil, yeni Muhafazakarlık ve Fethullah Gülen", Birikim, 99 (July 1997), 69.

<sup>9</sup> Ruşen Çakır, "Türkiye Bağımsız Bir Politik İslamcı Harekete Hiç Tanık Oldu mu?", in İslam ve Demokrasi. (İstanbul: TÜSES Yayınları, 1994 ), 113.

Yet, it was disappointing that there is an inner mechanism for supervision under Fethullah Hoca's personality in Fethullahcıs which does not seem to be challenged in anyway.

Another criticism about Fethullah Hoca is that although he is considered as a leader of a civil initiative, he has a tendency to standardize the people; he tries to make people think and behave similarly. This is a dilemma that in fact Fethullah Hoca has an individualistic approach to Islam- in order to construct society, he thinks it is crucial to bring up individuals with high morals. However, the traditions which keep cultural continuity and civil mobilization alive in Fethullah Hoca's interpretation of Said-i Nursi, propose a homogenous society that reject differences. Individual is not defined with his identity, but he is defined with his essence which means that in terms of needs and actions, he emphasizes a standard and atomistic understanding of individual; in terms of societal quality, he emphasizes solidarity.<sup>10</sup> Such an understanding may create a problem for the civil society attempt. Today, in Turkey, the most crucial problem seems to be how to reconcile the differences in the public realm. At this point, Fethullah Hoca has no answer, except, tolerance.<sup>11</sup>

One can also criticize Fethullah Hoca's being a democrat. Once, when he was in Erzurum, he heard that a film called "Birth of Islam" would be played in the cinema. He told the event in " Küçük Dünyam" as follows: "....everybody

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<sup>10</sup> Bayramoğlu, Yeniüzyıl, 2 November 1996.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*

had bought tickets for the film a week before. There were two cinemas in the city and they were the only places people went to enjoy. Most of the people wanted to go to that film because they thought seeing that film would be a pious act. When the day that the film would be shown came, I told about it very dramatically in the mosque. Because a woman who seemed to be unrespectful to religion could not represent Hz.Aişe. I turned to the community and said: "it was shame for you that they would make fun of your religion, your prophet and you would waste time by sitting here and listening to me ". Upon these words, the community stood up. I tried to calm them down, but they did not listen to me. They went to the cinema, destroyed it and beat the owner of the cinema".<sup>12</sup> When he was telling the story, I expect him to be regretful about such a violent act. But he concluded his words by saying that "...even Kanlı Fuat (a braggart in Erzurum) acted as a protector of the matter, supported the provoked masses."<sup>13</sup> It is interesting that the same Fethullah Hoca, today, had the Writers' and Journalists' Foundation (He is its spiritual leader) sponsor a film called " Köpekler Adası".<sup>14</sup> \*\*

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<sup>12</sup> Erdoğan, Küçük Dünyam, 75.

<sup>13</sup> ibid., 76.

<sup>14</sup> Milliyet, 26 October 1996.

\*\* The film is about the effort of a journalist to observe the life of an old artist who lived in an isolated island with dogs and report it.

One should accept that Fethullah Hoca has side-effects. Still, I think representing a civil initiative, a moderate approach, Fethullah Hoca differs from the other Islamists. In my opinion, Fethullah Hoca's voice will have more influence on the side of the secularists whose conception of democracy has been exclusive vis-a-vis the Islamists. I am hopeful about Fethullah Gülen's efforts because unlike the PP members, what Fethullah Hoca and his group in mind is a civil religion consisting of civic values and traditions; it is not a political religion aiming at establishing an Islamic state. By emphasizing tolerance, social harmony, Fethullah Hoca may emerge as one of the effective proponents of consensus politics and be an alternative solution to the crisis in consolidation of democracy in Turkey.



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